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# Tour Notes

**Best of Nicaragua**

**Tour Duration – 13 Days**



## Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

## Tour Pace

Moderate

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore the beautiful colonial cities of Leon and Granada
- ✓ Stay with a local family
- ✓ Explore the volcanic island of Ometepe
- ✓ Relax on the Pacific Coast at San Juan del Sur







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## Tour Map



## Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of mid-range hotels and home stay accommodation  
**Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary  
**Group Size:** Maximum of 12  
**Start Point:** Managua – you can arrive any time on Day 1  
**End Point:** Managua - you can depart on Day 13 anytime as from 13:00  
**Transport:** Minivan, public boat (to/from Ometepe Island)  
**Country Visited:** Nicaragua



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## Best of Nicaragua

Nicaragua, following a history of political and economic upheavals is now a peaceful and congenial place which has become impressively reconciled with the conflicts of its past. Visitors are increasingly drawn to its wonderfully unspoilt landscapes, where the bucolic tranquillity of countryside little changed over the centuries has as its counterpoint seething volcanoes and the legacy of earthquakes in times gone by. Here you will find a couple of the continent's finest Spanish colonial cities, Granada and León. Spruced up now, with their central Spanish cores faithfully restored, they have a real historical atmosphere, with lovely old mansions, baroque churches and cobbled lanes. And in Leon we will stay with a local family, an ideal opportunity to meet the friendly Nicaraguan people. Next stop will be the Selva Negra Cloudforest where we will learn about coffee production. And then we continue to Lake Nicaragua and the quiet island of Ometepe, whose isolation has protected it from the political upheavals of the past, and held back modern development. Finally, the trip ends with a relaxing stay at San Juan del Sur on the Pacific Coast.

## Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

## Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

# Itinerary

## Day 1: Arrival to Managua (approx. driving time today: 35 min)

On arrival at Nicaragua International Airport you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Overnight Los Robles Hotel or similar. No meals are included today.

## Day 2: Managua – Leon (approx. driving time today: 3 hours)

This morning we enjoy a short city tour of Managua. We will explore both the historical and modern facets of the city. Our first stop is Tiscapa Crater Lake where you have superb views over the entire city. On a clear day, you will be able to see several volcanoes to the north of the city. You can't miss the large silhouette of the famous revolutionary General Sandino statue that stands overlooking the Tiscapa Crater Lake. Next, we head over to the old city and the National Palace, the Old Cathedral, the National Theatre, the President's house. We also stop at Salvador Allende Port and to Malecon, Managua's favourite place for a lakeside drink. Continue to the Old Leon Ruins, a UNESCO world heritage site, before heading to Leon. On arrival we explore numerous colonial buildings, among them Nicaragua's first university.

In addition, you can climb to the rooftop of Central America's largest cathedral, recently added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites, and enjoy astonishing views over the city and the surrounding Maribios Volcanic Chain. Overnight Hotel Austria or similar. (BL)

## Leon Viejo

The first capital of Nicaragua, Leon Viejo (Old Leon) was founded in 1524 by the Spanish conquistadores, south of the Momotombo Volcano, and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The area suffered frequent





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volcanic activity, culminating in the earthquakes of 1594 and 1610. The city was not destroyed by the 1610 earthquake, but due to the damage caused to the infrastructure by the seismic activity, the settlers held a referendum and decided to relocate the city to its present location, about 20 miles to the west. The old city was gradually buried by the continuous expulsions of ash and volcanic stone coming from Momotombo, and by lake sediments. The ruins of Leon Viejo were discovered in 1967 and excavations began the following year revealing that the city had a similar layout to other cities in America at that time, laid out on a grid system with a main square located at its centre. Leon Viejo is the only 16th century colonial city in America that has never suffered city-planning alterations during its history.

### Leon

Leon is considered to be Nicaragua's historical, cultural, educational and religious capital. The best way to explore this captivating city is by foot, as much of its charm lies in the narrow colonial streets and architecture, art galleries, museums, restaurants and cafes. Leon's history is fascinating, like no other town in Central America. The town was dismantled, moved, and rebuilt due to volcanic activities, ransacked (and reconstructed!) by pirates, it won and lost its struggle as the most important city in Nicaragua against Managua, and several presidents were assassinated here. It is the place where famous poets are buried, where the largest cathedral in Central America stands, and is a hotbed for revolutionaries due to the big university located in Leon. In this guided walking tour we will visit revolutionary murals, baroque and neoclassical churches and a surprisingly interesting museum of legends, arts and poetry.

### Day 3: Leon – Morning hike excursion to Volcan Cerro Negro or Juan Venado Island boat tour

Early this morning you will have the option to join an excursion to hike to the top of the Cerro Negro Volcano. At approximately 7am, transfer for about one hour to the base of the volcano where you begin the ascent on foot from the north side, reaching the main crater after approximately one and a half to two hours. You hike first on trails and later on a kind of black dune created by former lava. As you reach the foot of the volcano you begin an easy climb up to the first of two active and vibrant craters. From here follow the edge of the crater to get to the second crater and highest point of the volcano. Standing on top of Cerro Negro, you have an unforgettable view stretching right over the volcanic chain. Spend approximately one hour around the main crater before returning at your hotel at approximately midday. The afternoon is at leisure. Overnight Hotel Austria or similar. (B)

**Note:** You should have a good level of physical fitness in order to undertake the climb to the top of the Cerro Negro. Alternatively, you can remain in Leon and take a short boat tour of the Juan Venado island in the morning.

### Cerro Negro

Cerro Negro is one of the youngest volcanos in Central America. Its terrain consists of gravel-type volcanic debris, and it's often referred to as the 'Black Hill'. Although it's less than a mile to the top of Cerro Negro, the hike up is very steep and considered difficult, so be prepared for a tough but rewarding 1.5-hour climb! When you reach the top, at an elevation of about 1,640 feet (500 meters), you will be afforded gorgeous views of the surrounding Telica and San Cristobal volcanos.

### Day 4: Leon – Hervideros de San Jacinto – Selva Negra Cloud Forest (approx. driving time today: 3 hours)

After breakfast we head to Hervideros de San Jacinto, a surprising area full of small volcanic craters, with boiling mud and water vapor. It is possible to walk on this hot surface around the craters. We continue to Selva Negra Cloud Forest where you can explore the property on your own. Overnight Selva Negra Hotel or similar. (B)





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### **Day 5: Selva Negra – Coffee and Farm Tour**

After breakfast we take a walking coffee tour. Learn about the whole process of coffee. History, location, climate, topography, sustainable use of bi-products and the social programmes are among the many aspects you will learn. We will get a chance to visit the nurseries, and plantations. After our coffee tour we will visit a local farm. We will witness many sustainable farming methods and pass by the organic laboratory, the worker's housing, the greenhouses, cheese house, chicken coops, and stables. Overnight Selva Negra Hotel or similar. (B)

### **Day 6: Selva Negra – Granada (approx. driving time today: 3 hours)**

Today we head south to the colonial city of Granada. On arrival we take a city tour by horse-drawn carriage obtaining a good sense of the rich history and authenticity of Spanish-colonial Granada. This afternoon we continue to Lake Nicaragua for a relaxing boat ride around some of the islands formed by the impressive Mombacho volcano. A boat trip through the Isletas of Granada is a great way to explore Lake Cocibolca, also known as Lake Nicaragua. These small islands are inhabited by families who make their living from fishing, while other islands are host to extravagant villas owned by Nicaragua's rich and famous. Along the way the guide will point out some of the prolific birdlife to be found on the lake as well as explaining about the history of the area. Overnight Colonial Hotel or similar. (BL)

### **Granada**

Granada was founded in 1524 and is believed to be the second oldest city established in mainland Latin America by the Spanish conquest. During colonial times, Granada saw much unrest as the city was attacked several times by pirates. Nowadays Granada is characterised by bright-coloured Spanish-colonial architecture, visible throughout the city centre. The ambiance is very pleasant and there is a wide array of restaurants and bars, especially along the boulevard from the central park to the shores of Lake Nicaragua.

### **Day 7: Granada - San Juan de Oriente – Catarina Viewpoint - Masaya Volcano National Park - Granada**

After breakfast, we travel to San Juan de Oriente, one of the so called 'Pueblos Blancos' where we will see its white colonial architecture. Here we will find beautiful arts and crafts as well as nurseries with beautiful flowers. We continue to Catarina and its viewpoint which offers amazing views over the area and then arrive at the bottom of the Masaya Volcano National Park. The Masaya Volcano is still active and is the only volcano in the western hemisphere where it is possible to drive to the rim and see the smoking crater. If we are lucky, we might encounter rare green parakeets which make their home at the volcano. From there, we embark another vehicle which takes us to the summit of the crater Santiago, notorious for displaying a gaseous activity and an incandescent lava lake in its interior. We take an opportunity to see inside the crater of the volcano, observing the red and glowing lava before to return to Granada. Overnight Colonial Hotel or similar. (BL)

### **Day 8: Granada - Mombacho Volcano Nature Reserve (nature hike) - Granada**

We start the day with a visit to Mombacho Volcano Nature Reserve to hike the Crater Trail. Suitable for anyone with a moderate level of fitness we will hike for around 2 hours and learn about the flora and fauna of the area. If conditions are clear we will visit an impressive viewpoint to take in wide vistas of the country's pacific region, the neighbouring city of Granada, and the great lake of Nicaragua and its islands. After the hike, return to Granada and the rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight Colonial Hotel or similar. (B)

**Note:** If you do not wish to do the hike, you can remain in Granada and enjoy a full day at your own leisure.

### **Day 9: Granada - Ometepe Island (1.45-hour ferry crossing)**

Today, we transfer to the port of San Jorge, at the shores of Lake Nicaragua or Cocibolca as the locals call it, and take the ferry to Isla de Ometepe. On arrival, transfer to the hotel and the afternoon is at leisure. There are many activities that you can arrange directly with your hotel. Overnight San Juan de la Isla Lodge or similar. (B)



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### **Ometepe Island**

The island of Ometepe is situated in one of the world's largest fresh water lakes, Lake Nicaragua. The two volcanoes on the island, Concepcion and Maderas, offer stunning views when approaching Ometepe by boat from the mainland. Both of the volcanoes have their own climate and unique vegetation and hiking either of them is a great way to enjoy spectacular views of the lake and the surrounding countryside.

### **Day 10: Ometepe Island**

Enjoy today a tour of the island, including the visit to Ojo de Agua, a small sculpture park of pre-Colombian ceramics, and the Museo de Ometepehas containing local ethnographic and environmental themes. Overnight San Juan de la Isla Lodge or similar. (B)

### **Day 11: Ometepe Island - San Juan Del Sur on the Pacific Coast** (1-hour ferry crossing; approx. driving time today: 2 hours)

Today, we take the ferry back to the mainland and continue to San Juan del Sur, in the south west. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight Victoriano Hotel or similar. (B)

### **San Juan Del Sur**

San Juan del Sur is one of the most popular destinations in Nicaragua. It used to be a quiet fishing village and has now emerged into one of the country's leading coastal destinations, but it has still maintained its charm and unique culture. The beaches are great for surfing almost all year long; also snorkelling or sailing trips are offered along the coast where turtles, dolphins and whales can sometimes be sighted.

### **Day 12: San Juan del Sur (day at leisure)**

Today is a leisure day. You can choose to simply relax at the nice hotel or perhaps try your hand at surfing. Another option is to go to Flor Beach to witness mass arrivals of turtles (during the season, August-January). The beach is a protected wildlife reserve because of the seasonal presence of Olive Ridley turtles that take place every year between August and January. Thousands of turtles arrive during certain nights to lay eggs at this one specific beach. About 50 days later, thousands of eggs hatch and the baby turtles try to make their way to the Pacific. Overnight Victoriano Hotel or similar. (B)

### **Day 13: San Juan del Sur - Managua – Departure** (approx. driving time today: 3 hours)

This morning we return to the capital and we transfer to the Managua International Airport where our tour ends. Your flight should not depart before 13:00. (B)

## *Tour Inclusions/Exclusions*

#### **Inclusions:**

Arrival and departure transfers  
All accommodation  
Ground Transportation  
Regular ferry tickets to / from Ometepe Island  
Services of an English speaking guide / tour leader  
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)  
Entrance fees as per the itinerary

#### **Excluded:**

International flights  
Items of a personal nature  
Any airport taxes





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Optional activities on Days 9 and 11  
Travel Insurance  
Visa if applicable  
Drinks  
Tips (discretionary)

## Important Information

### Foreign Travel Advice Warnings

Before booking your tour please familiarise yourself with the country specific information provided by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. This includes important information such as latest immigration requirements, and details of any travel advisories.

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Nicaragua. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

### Accommodation and Meals

#### Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals.

One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

#### Accommodation Rating

Our mid-range hotel accommodation offers a good level of service and comfort. The majority of rooms will be with en-suite bathrooms. Most hotels will have a restaurant and bar. On this tour we also use homestay accommodation, and you should expect more basic facilities, including shared bathrooms.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

#### Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.



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### **Dietary Requirements**

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

### **Budgeting for your Tour**

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

### **Food**

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch - £5

Dinner - £10 to £12

### **Drink**

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of beer - £2

Bottle of water - £1

### **Tipping – Guide and Drivers**

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 50 for tipping.

### **Foreign Exchange**

**ATM Availability:** Available in most major towns and cities, but as they can be unreliable have some cash as a back-up

**Credit and Debit Card Acceptance:** Cards can be useful and are accepted in many places but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Local Currency:** Cordoba

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** We recommend taking your money in US dollars cash

**Where to Exchange:** Your guide will advise you

### **Joining your Tour**

#### **Flight Information**

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

#### **Joining Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we





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have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

### Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to Nicaragua.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - [www.smartraveller.gov.au/](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/)

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate

USA (If flights transit): you will need to apply for an ESTA if you are transiting the USA as you will have to disembark and clear immigration before re-boarding for the onward flight. Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) - where you apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), which applies if you enter the country by sea or by air.

This must be done on line - <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely to be refused boarding. When completing an application for transit you should enter the words 'In Transit' with your final destination location in the address line.

You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover.

If you have visited Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan in the past five years or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot travel under the Visa Waiver Programme. Instead you will need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel.





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Please be aware that visa information is subject to change, therefore please refer to your nearest embassy for up to date advice. Please note that the price of your tour does not include visa costs. However, if visa support is required, including a letter of invitation, this will be provided.

### Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

### Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary.

All travellers entering Nicaragua from an area in which World Health Organization (WHO) has determined that there is a risk of active transmission of **Yellow Fever** must present a certificate of vaccination with validity of ten days. The priority countries of origin are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Panama, Venezuela, Paraguay and Peru. The measure also includes all African countries except the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Sao Tome and Principe, and Somalia.

**Please note:** Even flights with connections through Panama or any of the countries mentioned above will have to comply with the Yellow Fever Vaccination requirement.

We strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

## Preparing for your tour

### Climate

Tropical, with little seasonal variation in temperature. The heavy rainy season is May to October but it can rain at any time along the Caribbean coast of Rio San Juan. There are 3 main climactic zones, the hot tropical lowlands and the cooler hill region, which has a larger range of daily temperature.

### Clothing

Given the high temperatures and humidity cotton is the best fabric to wear. Lightweight, short-sleeved shorts and loose-fitting trousers or flowing skirts make the most comfortable outfits. For trekking long-sleeved shirts







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and trousers are a must in order to avoid scratches and bites. Other clothing essentials, irrespective of the season, are a lightweight raincoat or poncho, a hat, swimwear and sunglasses.

### **Equipment**

Take a torch, water bottle and sunblock. Binoculars are useful, as is a telephoto lens for keen photographers. Take a swimming costume and towel. Mosquito nets/screening is provided locally in the rooms where necessary, although we advise to bring some insect repellent.

### **Footwear**

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Lightweight walking boots are highly recommended plus trainers or sandals for general travelling.

### **Luggage on tour**

One main piece of luggage (we recommend a soft bag or holdall) plus day sack.  
Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg (please note airline allowances may vary)

### **Electric Supply & Plugs**

Generally electrical supply is 220-240V AC (50 Hz) and use European two circular pin style plugs.

### **Tour Itinerary Versions**

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 15 November 2022.