

# GO

CHICABRAVA SURF CAMP • TRAVEL AGENT REBOOT

BY KIM-MARIE EVANS



Kim-Marie heads to work

CATCHING A WAVE IS EASY, STANDING UP IS THE TRICKY PART



# Surfer Girl

Mastering a wave gives our travel writer far more than just a great photo opp

As I struggled to lift my hulking board onto the roof of our surf jalopy parked on a narrow street in Nicaragua, I wondered if I was in over my head, literally. I was about to embark on a week-long journey at the all-women's surf camp Chicabrava. I was about to live like all the surfers do—and celebrate my forty-ninth birthday doing so. Here there are no buff surf butlers to help, just a tiny blonde instructor from Germany named Stef. This trip was about girl power.

Picture a surf camp and you likely conjure images of fit young women with Victoria's Secret-worthy thighs and perfectly tousled hair. The owner of Chicabrava, Ashley Blayloc, explains that nothing could be further from the truth. "We get women of all shapes, sizes and ages. I've even taught

grandmas to surf." The name Chicabrava translates to Brave Girl.

Guests arrive with a wide array of skills, but share a singular goal, to master the pop up (surf slang for standing up on your board) and ride a wave. The camp is located in San Juan del Sur, a famed surf destination where the sun always shines and the winds are always perfect. It's the destination of choice for beginners and diehard surfers alike.

Accommodations are sparse. It's not about the room; it's about the waves. There are two houses to choose from, Surf House in town and Cloud Farm, which sits high on a hill with sweeping views surrounded by a working farm. The rooms are shared, mosquito nets are included, and meals are eaten family style. For everyone who has ever wanted to go back to summer camp,



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but with rum, Chicabrava is a dream come true. Instead of a chilly lake, however, you have an infinity pool and someone else makes your bed.

Mornings start early with classes on wave theory and how to perfect the pop up. After the first few days, they add the thrilling (and embarrassing) aspect of video review. While it's hard to watch yourself wipe out, often many times in a row, there is no better feeling than seeing yourself ride a wave.

On the first day, on the first wave, I popped up like a pro and rode all the way in. It turned out to be beginner's luck and was followed by at least three dozen wipeouts. While waiting for waves (Mother Nature is frustratingly unpredictable) I had hours to chat with the



Kim-Marie (far right) with her fellow surfers

instructors. The only local turned out to be an anomaly in Nicaraguan surfing, a sport that is almost entirely male. Being surrounded by other women, one who had only recently learned to swim, and emboldening instructors was an inspirational soup that is hard to define. When I finally rode another wave all the way to shore three days after my beginner's luck, I jumped off the board and burst into tears. I didn't see them coming. I cried for joy, for exhaustion, for making my instructor proud, for turning forty-nine on a surfboard and surprising myself.

**CHICABRAVA  
SAN JUAN DEL SUR, NICARAGUA**

Starts at \$1,300 for one week, and includes accommodations, meals and surfing  
[chicabrava.com](http://chicabrava.com)

# Travel Agent 2.0

Didn't know travel agents still existed? You're not alone



Jolie Goldring

Over 50 percent of travelers now book their vacations online, spending endless hours searching for the best deal on everything from hotels to airfare and rental cars. The thought of sitting down at your local travel agent's desk and choosing your getaway based on her shiny brochures seems somewhere between quaint and archaic. But just as the way we book travel has changed, so have travel agents. We sat down with Greenwich-based luxury travel expert and advisor Jolie Goldring to find out why a real-life human agent is your best bet.

## 1 GET TREATED LIKE A VIP

When you book with a Virtuoso Travel Agent (Virtuoso is an exclusive network of agencies, luxury hotels and cruise lines) like Jolie, you get amenities that include free breakfast, upgrades when available, and perks like \$100 room credits or spa appointments. "You might save \$25 booking with Expedia, but you won't be upgraded and have a personal amenity waiting in your room," says Jolie. "When an agent books, we get higher priority when it comes to confirming things like connecting rooms, or requests for a high floor or specific rooms, etcetera. We also reach out to our contacts and push hard for upgrades and make sure you have personalized amenities upon arrival. Hate white wine? Let us know. You'll only get red going forward."

## 2 GET YOUR TIME BACK

Instead of spending hours on your laptop trying to find that perfect hotel in Paris,

a good agent can give you the best options based on exactly what you're looking for. Not only do they know the hotels, but they have relationships that can get you a room when the hotel's website says "sold out."

## 3 GET A DEAL

Working with an agent that is Virtuoso-affiliated will not only get you the extra perks. Jolie explains that a lot of agencies proactively negotiate exclusive discounted rates. "For example we know our Greenwich client base travels to Miami a ton, so we have negotiated with a handful of desirable properties and these properties have provided us with special discounted rates."

## 4 GET HELP WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

When it comes to travel, it's not if something will go wrong, it's when. Flight canceled? A good agent will be ahead of that and have gotten you on the next flight. Room not as promised? An agent will call their contact at the hotel and make it right. And when things really go wrong, they are irreplaceable. One Virtuoso agent found a speedboat to rush a client's delayed luggage to their departing cruise ship. We're pretty sure there's no website for that.

## 5 GET PERSONAL SERVICE

Your agent will have your frequent flier numbers, know whether you like an aisle or window seat and make sure that you get your gluten-free meal. "When they come to us for help with a trip, we are already two steps ahead as we know how to anticipate their needs," says Jolie. "We keep profiles on our clients and know things about them—maybe they are advanced skiers or they love to surf or they are foodies. All these tidbits go into our thought process as we scout their next fabulous vacation."

*Fees are based on length of trip and number of travelers. A weeklong vacation for up to six people averages \$350. Full planning includes research, booking, concierge service and activity organizing.*