

ATENAS TODAY



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***ATENAS TODAY** is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 350 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at fredmac222@yahoo.com.*

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March 14, 15, and 16 in Nicaragua

One day of fishing and three days of adventure

By G. Martin Lively

The fishing in Lake Cocibolca is great. Second in size in Latin America only to Lake Titicaca, it covers approximately 8,624 sq km and, like a sea, features high winds, crashing waves, and even sharks. My friend Jim and I caught lots of guapote up to five pounds, managuense or jaguar cichlid in the two pound range, and very colorful mojarra every one of them around a pound. Both casting and trolling Big O's and Fat Raps worked, as did casting chartreuse and white spinner baits with bronze willow leaf spinners. Next time I will bring my fly rods and lots of small and medium popping bugs. The little islands surrounding the larger, populated islands provided far more action than Lake Arenal at it's best many years ago. I can't wait to go back.

We stayed at the Hotel Cabañas Paraiso* on San Fernando Island in the Solentiname Archipelago which is about two hours by boat from San Carlos, Nicaragua, in the far eastern part of Lake Nicaragua or Lake Cocibolca as it is called locally. Eduardo, his mother Maria Magdalena Pineda and the fishing guide/hotel worker Jose took wonderful care of us. Meals were simple home style Central American fare featuring rice and beans and a cabbage salad with tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers and either chicken, beef or – best of all, of course- your own just caught deep fried fish!



Jim and I left Atenas, Costa Rica, around 9:am on a Friday and, after stopping for the best wire whisked hot chocolate in the world in Zarcero, were in San Carlos (Quesada) by 11:30am for gas and sandwiches before continuing North to Los Chiles. We had read the last boat from Los Chiles to San Carlos, Nicaragua left at 3:30pm so we wanted to be there by 2:30pm to have time to find the Nicaraguan Visa Office and the boat and ticket offices. With a US passport there is no fee for the Nicaragua visa and the process took five minutes. The dock is three blocks from there and the stop in between at Costa Rica Immigration (\$7 exit tax) took about 20 minutes because of the line of Nicaraguan travelers headed home for Semana Santa. Luggage was never inspected and we were told to board the boat and pay the ticket cost (\$10) when underway. I dropped Jim and the luggage at the dock and drove back to the Rancho Eco Directa Hotel where they agreed to keep my car in their guarded parking lot for a dollar a night.

Our 3:30pm boat left somewhat after four pm. It was the last boat of the day and it waited for those in immigration and a little longer for a few who were “on their way” to the dock. A row of opposing bench seats lined the long narrow boat holding about 24 people. The hour on the Rio Frio was a birding experience; we saw ospreys, green herons, great blue herons, regal white herons, green kingfishers, cormorants and anhingas, as well as scores of other wading and insect catching birds.

As the river widened and a huge lake came apparent through the trees many of the Nicaraguans exclaimed in pride “Cocibolca, nuestra mar dulce.” We were at the confluence of the Rio Frio and the Rio San Juan and on the other side of the Rio San Juan perched San Carlos, Nicaragua, its fort and three cannon protecting Nicaragua from invasion via the San Juan River.

Customs and Immigration were fast and informal and located right at the dock. It was there that we got the bad news. We had missed the last \$10 trip to the Solentiname Islands. Eduardo from Hotel Villa Paraiso knew that we would, and he was there with his launch. The run from San Carlos to San Fernando Island is \$100 via water taxi and that is not bad if there are a lot of passengers (the boat holds a dozen), but it was only the two of us! \$50! Ah the price of adventure fishing.

The sun was lowering, but still hot and the canvas top shaded us and the four, triple wide seats with backrest. Its last rays turned to a rosy gold sunset silhouetting the islands with San Fernando dead ahead.

We were shown to our rooms and their array of generator, battery and solar ceiling lights. The generator lights and ceiling fan ran only from 8pm ‘til 11pm. The solar light was available of course during the day and the generator also recharged the battery light which was available at all times, hopefully. A simple Central American casado filled us up and got us ready for the agreed 6:30am fishing trip the next morning.



Excitement prevailed and I did not need my wristwatch alarm to wake me a 5:30am, I was ready at 5. Jim was awake also when I knocked on his door and soon Jose took us down the short flight of stairs to the dock and out to the islets surrounding the bigger island we stayed on. We trolled medium diving, short, fat bodied lures of many makes - and they all worked. In the first hour we each caught a half a dozen nice fish, each more brilliantly colored than the last. We stopped to cast and Eduardo showed up in a second boat brining coffee and some pan dulce. He joined us and the four of us fished, alternating trolling and casting to likely looking shoreline places for another hour and a half. Lots of fish.

After a breakfast of gallo pinto and scrambled eggs we visited the local art cooperative and Solentiname Museum. Primitive oil painting and smooth, bright colored balsa

animals were the features. (Next time I bring more cash, the paintings were gorgeous and priced at less than half their Costa Rican equivalents.) Siestas and then the lake called. Another two and half hours like the morning, except this time I caught a BIG ONE. It was a five pounder, called lagunero here and guapote in Costa Rica. The scientific name for this large, fresh water cichlid is *Parachromis Dovi*. Aquarists call it the Wolf Cichlid which tells you something about its aggressive nature.

Dinner Saturday featured our own caught fish which were deep fried whole. Rico and delicious!

Sunday it was pack up and reverse the boat trips back to San Carlos and Los Chiles and then we were on the road to home. Lots of big trucks on the two lane highway especially on the mountain curves makes time estimates unreliable, but I would say that it was about two and half hours from Los Chiles to San Carlos (Quesada) and another hour and a half from there to Atenas. Leave time for frequent rest and refreshment stops.

Great trip. Great fishing. (Next time from San Carlos I will boat down the San Juan River a couple of hours to El Castillo. I hear the Sabalo Lodge is nice and the San Juan River in that area offers one of the few places in the world to fish a river for tarpon. Stay tuned.)



Even if you don't fish, the Solentiname Islands offer a great 72 get away from Costa Rica for visa renewal purposes. The wildlife, art and river boating adventure are worth it.

*Hotel Cabañas Paraiso
Isla San Fernando
Archipiélago del Solentiname
Rio San Juan, Nicaragua
gsolentiname@amnet.com.ni
Tel. 278-3998 Cel. 894-7331, 824-1860