

## Fresh from the new Los Chiles border run

By Diane Cooner

Los Chiles is a nice little border town next to the Rio Frio that is a lot quieter now that the long awaited bridge in Nicaragua has been completed. Boats still travel the river but you'll need to make that another trip, as they no longer work in coordination with a visa run. So here is my story:

My two traveling companions rented a car from Action Rental in Grecia, located just past the Feria entrance heading out of Grecia. We left Grecia at around 6:15am, stopping at the Mirador restaurant halfway between Naranjo and Zarcero for our first break.

We continued to San Carlos, through Muelle (the iguanas are still in the trees at The Iguana Bar), and on past Los Chiles to the border, arriving around 11:15am. We were able to park the rental car in a place where there were many people passing by including police, although there was no official guard watching the cars that were also parked there.

Once at the border facility, you go to an initial check-in, pick up and fill out a customs declaration, and proceed to pay your exit fee via bank card and passport swipe. Next, step up to an open window and present your documents. The agent will then stamp your passport allowing you to exit to Nicaragua. My companions sailed right on through in 5 minutes. Then it's a quick walk across the border to Nicaragua, where you have to check in as well. At this time they were taking people's pulses because of concerns for the H1N1 virus. Fill out another customs form, pay a fee, get another stamp and then head into San Carlos for lunch – you will need to stay in Nicaragua a minimum of three hours before you can pass back through the border. We rented a mini-van that was for hire for a trip to the nearest bar, as there are NO services at the border, and since we didn't have time to get to San Carlos for official lunch).

After the 3 hour wait, you can head back to the border, repeat all the same steps above(only in reverse as you're in Nicaragua), and get stamped back into the country, usually for 90 days although they have been known to give less.

We stayed in Los Chiles at a place called Hotel Wilson. I have heard many stories pro and con, that's just how Costa Rica is! This time it was pro, I enjoyed a great dinner at the Heliconia Restaurant next door, and the next morning was treated to lots of birds all over the Rio Frio, and no wonder since this location is near a national nature preserve.

After breakfast that was included in the cost of the room, we had a nice ride back to our part of Costa Rica with a couple of fun stops on the way.

A very civil way to make that 90 day run! Although I'm sorry I missed the boat trip as a necessary part of the experience.

Costs (yours may vary):

Rental car - \$89 for 2 days – we had a great little Hyundai that barely used any fuel.

Breakfast on the way - 2,500 colones

Exit tax, Costa Rica – \$7.00

Nica border tax - \$1.79 each way or \$3.58

Hotel Wilson room including breakfast 29.48

Dinner - \$12.00