

Cruisers Explore the Rio Dulce Area

January 19, 2017 by Deb Eldridge, SV Neytiri

Two boats, Neytiri, a Privilege 435 out of the U.S., and Flying Fish, a BaltiCat out of Germany headed out under the bridge at around 1:30 p.m. on the ninth, just after a cold front came through. The weather was starting to clear but rain was possible almost every day. The Neytiri crew, then a monohull called Sanity, did a ten-day lap of Lago Izabal in 1995; and it was a first trip to the lake for Flying Fish. We wanted to revisit the legendary Denny's Beach from old memories. The Denny's Beach anchorage and restaurant were both empty; but the restaurant was open, and we had a good meal. The wind picked up in the evening and the anchorage got rough, giving us good reason to tighten up halyards, close locker doors, and secure rolling things. Because of the conditions, we had no problem deciding to head to El Estor after a champagne birthday brunch, courtesy of Flying Fish. (Click "Read more..." below for continuation.)

We anchored just to the east of the city dock in El Estor in 15 to 20 feet of water. The holding was good but felt a bit rocky. Old Rio Dulce Chisme articles suggested checking in with officials at the head of the city dock but we did not find that office. We went east a few hundred meters to the naval station. They were nice enough and indicated the area we were in was part of their patrol and that they would have eyes on our boats. We then walked west to the municipal building just off the city dock and met a city administrator named Eric. We're not absolutely certain of his name, but he will probably find you if you're near the building. Eric began helping us immediately and had us stage a couple of group photos; we guessed for his El Estor promotional effort. We told him we were looking for an El Boqueron Canyon tour and he took it from there, telling us to be back at 8:00 a.m. the next morning. The next morning, we got a tour of the municipal building, met a few other officials (who also made a point that they would be watching out for our boats), and were handed over to Juan Tacaj. His contact information is: Juan Tacaj: Juantaca12@gmail.com Reserva Natural Seacacar 4604 8346 Juan arranged the El Boqueron Canyon transportation, tour, and innertube trip for 150 per person. The four of us, Juan and our driver, left El Estor in a nice sized SUV, starting the tour with the Mayan earring and necklace cooperative and school as part of the Seacacar Project in Q'eqchi. We were also shown the new restaurant and two-unit hotel overlooking the river. We changed into our swim gear at the hotel and were fitted out with life jackets and their two helmets. Our two young guides hauled the inner tubes, and we hiked about a third of a mile downstream on a well-maintained trail. The hike included a photo op at their ceremonial cave. We asked when they have ceremonies and the answer was "whenever they feel like it." The innertube trip was a real surprise. It is one of the prettiest canyons we've seen with steep, tall walls and beautiful rock formations. The young guides swam along to make sure we hit the more rapid sections correctly but there were only two of these and they were easy to get through. The trip lasted about 45 minutes and we pulled out at El Boqueron. Our backpacks and transportation back to El Estor were waiting for us. There are good changing areas at the beginning of the trip at the new hotel but only primitive changing areas to get back into dry clothes at the end of the trip. They provided dry bags for anything we wanted to take on river but we also brought our own. We arranged the Rio Polochic part of our visit while we were arranging the El Boqueron Canyon trip the day before. The morning of our last day at 6:00 a.m. we were picked up by a launch at each boat for a tour of the shoreline west of El Estor and the howler monkey rivers feeding Lago Izabal. The trip (at 100Q per person) included Ensenata Los Lagartos, Rio Polochic, a number of bird nesting areas including a flock of Roseate Spoonbills, and a manatee search. Our guide, Pedro, spoke only Spanish but had detailed knowledge of the wildlife in the area. Pedro had us back on our boats by around 10:30 with enough time to easily make it back to Fronteras. Security seems to be a major part of the conversation about Lago Izabal. Our experience in the El Estor area was very positive. The people we interacted with went out of their way to make us feel safe on our two excursions and about our boats left behind. Chuck & Deb Eldridge, s/v Neytiri Claudius & Claudia Wasmer, s/v Flying Fish