

# Lodge at Pico Bonito Conservation Initiatives

Without The Lodge at Pico Bonito as a presence, the fragile ecosystem of which it is part would be severely threatened by human encroachment, mismanagement and lack of financial resources. Unsustainable timber extractions, deforestation, "slash and burn" agriculture, cattle ranching and illegal hunting are some of the detrimental activities that The Lodge has eliminated on its 350 acres, as well as in adjacent areas of 270,000 acre Pico Bonito National Park. Other activities by The Lodge that are helping to protect the environment include:

- Financing Honduran Military patrols along the northern border of the national park to discourage poaching and illegal timber cutting. These park guards are also afforded transportation, free accommodations and meals at the Lodge at Pico Bonito.
  - Being one of the first ecotourism projects in Honduras, operating since June 2000, offering a sustainable economic use of the rainforest while promoting and ensuring its conservation.
  - Consistent training of all Lodge staff on the importance of rain forest conservation, in the interest of education and dissemination of this information into the local community.
  - Together with the national park, becoming a crucial part of the "Paseo Pantera Biological Corridor" which unites protected ecological systems throughout Central America.
- This includes on-going camera trap studies of Jaguars and Mountain Lions on The Lodge's property. The Lodge provides free accommodations to Panthera Foundation ([www.panthera.org](http://www.panthera.org)) staff and biologists, and offers its own staff for support. We also offer free use of facilities to Panthera for Jaguar conservation conferences and local community education programs.
- Serving as a scientific research/study center for a number of U.S. universities, including the University of Florida, resulting in the discovery of new species each year, as well as promotion rain forest research and conservation in Honduras.
  - Becoming a major supporter of the ICF (Honduran Forestry Institute) and being its release site for numerous rehabilitated mammalian, avian and reptilian species.
  - Entering into an "Eco-Alliance" with the not-for-profit NGO responsible for management of the national park. This includes use of the Lodge's guides for special park events, and donating a percentage of its cabin revenues to this NGO.
  - A re-forestry project that is returning former plantation and pasture areas into lush, secondary rain forest habitat, thus increasing bio-diversity.
  - The Lodge offers free access to its Nature Guides, Facilities and Trail systems to local schools and Eco-Tourism projects in order to further education and conservation of Pico Bonito National Park and its threatened rain forests.
  - The Lodge is the creator and organizer of the Honduras Birding for Conservation Tour ([www.hondurasbirdtour.com](http://www.hondurasbirdtour.com)), a biennial bird watching event which generates hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Honduran economy, \$40,000+ for conservation projects in Honduras, and provides a platform for local birding guides and companies to showcase and promote themselves.

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# Cultural Preservation and Community Engagement

One of The Lodge's primary social objectives is the employment of Hondurans. In addition to promoting goodwill by hiring local workers in an area where unemployment is rampant, our guests enjoy interacting with the local population as part of their eco-experience. The challenge faced by The Lodge in meeting this objective has been the slim employee pool in a country where no luxury hospitality industry exists. However, through its training programs, The Lodge has hired a staff that is 98% Honduran.

The local benefits from The Lodge range from the obvious (a boost to the local economy from \$4.5 million spent on construction and operation) to the subtle (recognition of the economic potential of the rainforest as a recreation destination that requires protection, a unique precedent for Honduras) to the subliminal (a sense of pride throughout The Lodge's staff and its neighbors from being part of something that people worldwide are coming to see and praise). Below are other examples of the local benefits.

- The Lodge purchased 35 acres of land adjacent to The Mayan Ruins of Copan. This land, which was being looted for its archaeological artifacts, was offered to The Honduran Institute of Anthropology as a study site.
  - The Lodge allows its trails to be used by school groups in order for these children to develop a better appreciation of the unique environment in which they live.
  - The Lodge employs more than 50 people from the surrounding communities, as well as supporting hundreds of secondary providers.
  - The Lodge hosts a yearly conservation art contest where local students create and enter their artworks, all centered on the conservation of the rain forest and Pico Bonito National park.
  - The Lodge promotes and sells local artisan crafts in its gift shop.
  - Most importantly, the jobs offered (guides, chefs, security personnel, front desk staff) and the skills taught (bilingual training, hospitality skills, travel planning, restaurant management, conservation) provide advancement opportunities beyond The Lodge for its workforce, as well as employment opportunities for its neighbors from new businesses The Lodge is attracting to this region.
- The resultant Lodge-financed archaeological excavations shed light on the origins of Mayan culture in Honduras and served to create a model for Government/landowner cooperation.
- In the past, people who had archaeological artifacts on their land would destroy it in fear that their land might be appropriated by the government. The Lodge's project laid the foundation for many other initiatives in the Copan area, thus preserving more of the country's precious archaeological heritage.
- The Lodge provides land to the Honduran military as a staging point for patrolling the national park.
  - The Lodge built a working butterfly farm and serpentarium that assist in teaching community members about the biological diversity of the ecosystem in which they live.

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