

Sustainability Guide: Honduras

You are about to embark on a unique excursion to the exotic Central American country of Honduras, bordering the Pacific Ocean on the southern coast and the Caribbean Sea on the north coast. The country boasts more than 6,000 species of plants, 250 species of reptiles and amphibians, more than 700 bird species, and 110 mammal species. The numbers show that there is incredible, unparalleled biodiversity in Honduras. But Honduras is a developing nation and suffers from many environmental issues that threaten this unique biodiversity. The major environmental issues in Honduras are soil erosion and loss of soil fertility due to the traditional slash and burn agricultural practices. Deforestation is also a prevalent issue as the forests are used for lumber, firewood, and land cultivation. 65% of the country's energy comes from burning wood. Rivers and streams in Honduras are threatened by pollution from mining chemicals. The majority of Honduras' environmental issues stem from the expanding urban population. As the population grows too large for cities, the citizens of Honduras are expanding onto forests lands, clearing the trees and natural flora and fauna in order to make new residential and commercial developments. Honduras is a developing country and as most developing countries, it is hard to implement environmental awareness when most of the country is impoverished and survival and development are often times given more importance.

Efforts, however, are being made to preserve the natural beauty of this Central American country. *Sustainable Harvest International* provides farmers and communities in the tropics with long-term assistance implementing environmentally and economically sustainable technologies. Their mission is to reverse environmental degradation by helping rural inhabitants restore ecological stability and sustainable economic productivity to overexploited lands.

Friends of the Earth (FoE) and *Moveimento Madre Tierra* aim to deeply impact people who are affected by social and environmental injustice. FoE has built up community capacities through four main sectors: an ecology seminar, a forests-health-human rights workshop, a reforestation campaign, and activities to foster family gardens. *Manejo Integrado de Recursos Ambientales* (MIRA) is a \$23 million program to strengthen the local capacity to create and administer watershed management plans. The program will also stimulate policy reform related to integrated management of natural resources.

As a guest to this special country, you can take part in conserving the environment of Honduras.

The following are some tips to keep in mind while traveling and when you return home:

- recycle and sort rubbish;
- separate organic matter from cans and glass bottles, taking that organic matter to a compost heap that is subsequently used as good organic waste;
- use recycled paper; and
- avoid buying plastic and over packaged goods as plastic is difficult to recycle and does not break down naturally. This results in the animals and their natural rainforest habitats rapidly becoming extinct.

Fortunately, as a guest of Elevate Destinations, you will be staying in eco-lodges with conservation and environmentalism goals embedded in their practices.

Guide to Eco-Lodges in Honduras

Pico Bonito Lodge is located within the magnificent rainforest of Pico Bonito National Park. The Lodge at Pico Bonito donates a portion of its cabin charges to La Fundacion del Parque Nacional Pico Bonito, a not-for-profit organization that preserves and promotes Pico Bonito National Park. On the grounds of the lodge there is a tropical butterfly farm and serpentarium; natural species of butterflies are bred there and exported to collectors and butterfly houses around the world. The Serpentarium provides guests a chance to educate themselves on the native snake species of Honduras. Pico Bonito also takes part in the local community. Adelante Foundation is doing its part to eliminate poverty by providing micro-credit loans to poor women in rural Honduras who never before had access to money. The women use this money to start their own businesses and over time many can work their way out of poverty. Guests are able to see an "assembly" where 30-50 Adelante borrowers meet to learn new business skills and important health information. Guests can also interact with the women and learn about their businesses.

Palmetto Bay Plantation is committed to the land, the sea, and the people of their community. This eco-lodge aims to promote and protect all natural resources in a manner that is respectful and that will conserve them for future generations. There is a strong commitment to sustainable land use, as the hotel is on the coastline of one of the world's most beautiful reefs. The land surrounding the hotel and the beaches are completely unspoiled and remain in their natural state.

Hacienda San Lucas is a one hundred year old family run, eco-luxury lodge. In order to combat deforestation, the family has planted over 4,600 native trees. This action was to stop soil erosion from slash and burn agricultural practices of the indigenous people of Honduras and to provide sanctuary for local wildlife. Educational programs have been provided to local farmers on the importance of the forests; one such program was for farmers to receive payment in bushels of corn to plant trees instead of corn on deforested land. The family maintains open communication with the local villages surrounding the Hacienda, making sure that San Lucas benefits these communities.



There have been numerous programs implemented by the founding family to train local men and women to give tours, to make crafts to sell to guests, and to utilize local recipes in the restaurants. Recently, local materials were used in building additions to the Hacienda and special attention was given to certain areas as to not destroy any ancient Mayan structures. Hacienda San Lucas also practices ancient construction methods without the use of modern machinery or electricity.