

## **Profiles in Sustainable Tourism**

### **Protected Areas of the Gulf of Honduras**

## **Natural Wonders and Responsible Tourism Meet Near Clear Caribbean Waters**

**G**UATEMALA AND HONDURAS BOTH HAVE protected wildlands near the Gulf of Honduras and are promoting the parks as a destination for nature lovers and responsible tourists. The San Gil Mountain Springs Protection Reserve in Guatemala and the Jeannette Kawas Park in Honduras are both two good examples of local governments, residents and conservation groups can work together to conserve biodiversity while sustainably using natural resources.

Cerro San Gil Reserve is in the Caribbean coast of Guatemala and holds 116,139 acres, home to hundreds of bird species -- many of them migratory -- scores of mammals, important wetlands and watersheds, which make the protected area a vital source of fresh water for the region.

In addition to conducting biological research in the reserve, the Foundation for Eco-development (FUNDAECO for its name in Spanish) has convinced local authorities to arrange for those who use potable water from the reserve to pay an additional cost for this service. “Even though [the fee] is not the true value of the water, this is an example to be replicated throughout Central America,” notes Néstor Windevoxhel, representative of The Nature Conservancy, which has collaborated with FUNDAECO in reserve conservation projects. The two groups also helped create recreational zones for tourists and environmental education programs and handi-craft classes for local communities. The goal is to foster a greater commitment to conservation among the 36 neighboring communities.

Lucrecia Morataya of FUNDAECO explains that the NGO’s programs have benefited Rainforest Alliance workshops on sustainable tourism by providing specific information that can be passed on to local residents. Involving the community

and visiting tourists in conservation tasks is fundamental, he says, because there are only ten guards to watch over Cerro San Gil Reserve’s flora and fauna.

Just as the park rangers guard Cerro San Gil, Luis García patrols Jeannette Kawas National Park on the Caribbean coast of Honduras. Not long ago, García hunted wild birds for the pet trade, but after learning more about the damage he was causing and the possibilities of making a more sustainable living, García became a strategic ally in the work of conserving the park’s biodiversity.

Established 10 years ago, Jeannette Kawas Park gives visitors the chance to interact with the indigenous Garifuna community, plus see dolphins, whale sharks and resident and migratory birds; or simply enjoy the beauty of the coral reefs. The Foundation for the Protection of Lancetilla, Punta Sal and Texiguat, or PROLANSATE, promotes sustainable tourism initiatives in the park, particularly those that help involve local residents like Luis García.



**Jeannette Kawas National Park is famous for its diversity of flora and fauna. (Photo by Rosario Calderón, TNC)**



**The communities surrounding San Gil Reserve are committed to conservation. (Photo by Rosario Calderón, TNC)**

PROLANSATE's work involves training so that allows community groups can offer sustainable tourism services to visitors, plus occasionally providing needed equipment, explains José Antonio Fuentes, a trainer for the group. With help from PROLANSATE, such enterprises as a bakery run by a women's group; family businesses that prepare food and

offer shelter to tourists wanting to escape the mid-day sun; an association of boatmen who abandoned intensive fishing to offer tours or sport fishing excursions; and artisans who sell handmade crafts have sprung up near the park.

According to Ronald Sanabria, director of the Rainforest Alliance's sustainable tourism program, "these efforts and many more demonstrate that it is feasible to develop tourism together with good practices. Everything depends on the responsibility assumed by the entrepreneurs, communities, organizations and the tourists themselves."



**Jeannette Kawas Park, people can learn more about the garifuna community.**



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ASOCIACION  
**Alianza Verde**

*Alianza Verde is a local entity, private and non-profit, created in 1998, whose mission is participate in the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of Petén, promoting sustainable, responsible and low-impact tourism.*

*Learn more about the Alianza Verde:*  
**[www.alianzaverde.org](http://www.alianzaverde.org)**



**Rainforest Alliance**

*Alianza para Bosques*

*The mission of the Rainforest Alliance is to protect ecosystems and the people and wildlife that depend on them by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Companies, cooperatives and landowners that participate in our programs meet rigorous standards that conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable livelihoods.*

*Learn more about the Rainforest Alliance:*  
**[www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org)**

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