

Travel Reader

Hi guys! I'm Marina Solovyov and the new intern for GoNOMAD. I just spent a year abroad in Spain and have a passion to study new cultures. I'll be writing about unique travels and giving updates on things happening all over the world. Hope you enjoy the posts, and don't be shy to leave some comments!!

MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2007

A Green Getaway Mixed with the Local Culture of Belize



Three years ago, when Jeff Pzena set out to the Punta Gorda Farmers' market to buy what he thought

were almonds but turned out to be cacao beans; an idea was born. Pzena teamed up with Chris Crowell to develop a resort that would incorporate the important cultural activity of chocolate-making in an environmental sustainable setting for visitors of Belize. In Belize, the cacao bean which was once used as the currency for the ancient Mayas is still an important medium for cultural exchange in Belize among local farmers. In learning about traditional techniques and visiting local farmers, the pair came up with the Cotton Tree Lodge set in the southernmost region of Belize.

“Our program is all about exposing guests to this and about the reverse – exposing the farmers to people from another culture,” says Pzena.

The Cotton Tree Lodge boasts of solar power use, an organic garden and a reforestation program that plants teak and mahogany trees. The resort has also created a composting system with flush toilets and a self-contained reservoir that uses banana plants to return nutrients to the soil.

But the lodge is more than just an eco-friendly resort; it also offers guests a hands-on experience in its traditional chocolate-making workshops. They involve everything from picking fruit from cacao trees and drying the beans with local Maya farmers to cooking chocolate and discussing fair trade with members of the Toledo Cacao

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Growers Association.

As if all that isn't enough, Cotton Tree is also working with Sustainable Harvest International to establish a demonstration farm to introduce the neighboring community to agricultural practices that have lower environmental impact, like organic pesticide-free growing and smokeless stoves for roasting cocoa beans.

The Cotton Tree Lodge opened on January 1st of this year in Toledo, Belize. The double occupancy rooms start at \$198 a person including all meals and activities. To learn more about the lodge visit: www.cottontreelodge.com

By, Melissa Vitti

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posted by Daryl @ 2:54 PM

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[October 2005](#)

[November 2005](#)

[December 2005](#)

[January 2006](#)

[February 2006](#)

[March 2006](#)

[April 2006](#)

[May 2006](#)

[June 2006](#)

[July 2006](#)

[August 2006](#)

[September 2006](#)

[October 2006](#)

[November 2006](#)

[December 2006](#)

[January 2007](#)

[February 2007](#)

[March 2007](#)

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