

Making a Difference: Los Cardones Surf Ecolodge

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Our **Making a Difference** award winner this month is **Los Cardones Surf Ecolodge**, a laid-back beachfront hotel on Nicaragua's Pacific coast. Los Cardones has three stilted bungalows, five cabañas, and a restaurant serving fresh, local food right on the beach. Owner Anne Laure Sitton has taken a particular interest in protecting the sea turtles that come to nest on their beach and in developing community education projects -- and she encourages guests to participate in these efforts as well. We spoke with Anne Laure about Los Cardones and the unique guest experience the lodge provides.

Q. What makes your location, Playa Los Cardones, special?

Sitton:

Playa Los Cardones is a pristine beach with preserved coastal dry tropical forest and mangroves. Guests can see caimans, iguanas, migratory and local birds, and small mammals. We also have four species of sea turtles that nest on our beaches: olive ridley, leatherback, hawksbill, and green.

Q. Your hotel has its own program for conserving sea turtles. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

S:

Poachers used to steal eggs from the nests and sell them on the black market. So in 2001, we started relocating sea turtle nests from the beach to our property in order to prevent the poachers from getting to them. **Fauna & Flora International** (FFI) has since trained some of our staff members on sea turtle nursery management. We collect data on the mothers and hatchlings and take note of any occurrences that might be of

biological interest to enrich FFI's national database. More than 7,000 hatchlings have been cared for in our nursery in the past ten years.

Guests can get involved by helping us patrol the beaches at night to look for nesting sea turtles and release hatchlings into the ocean. They can also participate in the sea turtle programs that we run at local schools and raise awareness of our activities in their own communities, as well as make donations to support our programs.

Q. What about your community education program? Can guests get involved with that, too?

S:

Guests can join us on our weekly visits to the schools, during which we lend books from our mobile library and offer educational activities on varied themes, such as the environment, the arts, sports, English, science, health, careers, and crafts. Guests with special skills are invited to share those with the students, such as playing an instrument, yoga, and teaching English.



Q. Do you have any other noteworthy sustainability initiatives you'd like to share?

S:

We have been reforesting as much as we can, both in the lodge area and in another property of ours. Our lodge is run exclusively on solar power and our water is supplied by our own well that is fitted with a mechanical pump and a gravity tank. Gray water is recycled through a network of perforated pipes that irrigates our gardens. In addition, all organic waste is recycled onsite by thermophilic composting.

Q. Why is sustainability so important for your hotel? **S:** We want our lives and work to be meaningful, and to participate in making the world a better place.

Looking for a relaxing vacation that benefits local communities and wildlife? Stay at Los Cardones! More information about Los Cardones Surf Ecolodge is available on their [SustainableTrip profile](#).