

Ecotourism Brings the Gift of Learning to the Children of Rural Costa Rica

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From **Selva Verde Lodge's** beginnings in the 1980s, it was a pioneer in supporting the local community, especially women. Deep in the lowland tropical rainforests of Sarapiquí, founders Giovanna Holbrook and Berth Carter hired members of remote local communities to work at their budding ecotourism lodge. They established a rule that staff members must retrieve their own paychecks, so that husbands could not collect their wives' earnings, helping women to gain domestic empowerment and independence.

For a long time, attending school was just a dream for Sarapiquí's poorest children because their families could not afford the cost of textbooks. Consequently, in 1993, Selva Verde Lodge partnered with JADE (Joventud Activa Desarrollo Educativo, or "Active Youth for Educational Development") to open a public library to give local children free access to the textbooks they needed. From these noble beginnings, the library evolved over the years into the **Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center (SCLC)**, a robust community center that is now the local headquarters for the **San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor**. Today, this impressive place is a community center, conservation organization, and ecotourism operation all in one.

Travelers to the Sarapiquí region come for the multitude of nature activities available in this lush jungle setting, such as rafting on the Sarapiquí River and visiting nearby hot springs, waterfalls, and volcanoes. Twenty minutes away from SCLC is another amazing ecotourism attraction: **La Selva Biological Station**, one of the world's most important sites for tropical biology research. La Selva Biological Station offers accommodations in its Rainforest Alliance Verified™ ecolodge and nature tours with bilingual naturalist guides. Back at SCLC, travelers can take advantage of the center's rich cultural ties and participate in Costa Rican cooking classes, Latin dancing classes, and visits to local

schools and farms.

The Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center remains the only public library in the region. It is currently implementing programs such as a children's theater camp, preschool story time, open lab computer assistance, movie days, adult literacy programs, women's empowerment workshops, and celebrations for national and international holidays, such as World Water Day.

If you're looking for a great gift for an environmentally-conscious loved one (or if you're in the generous holiday spirit yourself), think about making a donation to SCLC's library! You'd be hard pressed to find a better cause than giving the gift of books, learning, and literacy. Learn how to make a donation on SCLC's [donation page](#).

