

Making a Difference: duPlooy's Jungle Lodge

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Our **Making a Difference** award winner for this month is **duPlooy's Jungle Lodge**, a Rainforest Alliance Verified eco-hotel situated on the banks of the Macal River in Belize. duPlooy's blew us away with their thoughtful and comprehensive sustainability plan (available on their SustainableTrip.org profile), which tackles important issues such as energy consumption, food sourcing, building materials, community outreach, and more. We spoke with owner Judy duPlooy to find out more about her impressive Belizean lodge.

Q: What kinds of wildlife can guests expect to see at your lodge?

duPlooy:

Guests can enjoy what we call the "morning show" - with your complimentary coffee each morning, you can see up to 20 bird species visiting our feeder. We encourage guests to start looking for the species they see at the feeder in bird books and on bird walks. Exposing our guests to these creatures increases awareness of the need to protect them.

We've also counted six hummingbird species visiting the feeders and flowers around our deck, and a small colony of bats lives at the end of our canopy walkway. Kinkajous, also known as honey bears, regularly visit our deck at night.

In total, over 300 species of birds can be found around the property. Agoutis, armadillos, and gibnuts run around near the rooms and in the botanic gardens. Coatamundis have been seen on the trails in the rainforest restoration area. People also see foxes quite often, as well as the occasional jagurundi, margay, or jaguar. There are 38 species of bats on the property, 9 species of frog, tarantulas, iguanas, basilisk lizards, and several other lizard species. River otters have been spotted occasionally by the river.

Q: Why is beef not on the menu?



dP:

duPlooy's has never served beef, in part because cattle ranching is responsible for a lot of deforestation in the region. Ranchers clear forestland to provide pasture and grow food for the animals. There is also a methane problem associated with raising cattle, and we often do not agree with the way these animals are treated.

As an alternative, we serve organic or free range chickens and eggs when possible.



Q: What can your guests do to learn about local culture and customs?

dP:

To learn about ancient cultures, travelers can visit the four major Mayan sites accessible from duPlooy's, as well as caves that are designated archaeological sites. Guests learn about present-day Belizean culture through interaction with our staff and their guides. They can also visit a local women's co-op, the local market, and the town of San Ignacio.

In October, we will be opening our food deck, which will feature a Mayan-style *fogone* (stove) and participatory cooking demonstrations for our guests. If space allows, we will also open this to the public. We will also feature food from other cultures of Belize and unusual fruits from the gardens.

Q: What do your guests say they enjoyed the most when they leave duPlooy's?

dP:

They enjoy the adventures - caves, Mayan sites, and horseback riding. Guests also love our botanic gardens and trails and tubing, swimming, and canoeing the Macal River from our beach.

We like it best when they complement our staff, service and food -- which they often do!



Q: Why is sustainability so important to your hotel?

dP:

When we came to Belize in 1988, we recognized the importance of sustainability. Time has only reinforced this notion, as we are seeing more and more natural resources destroyed all over the world. The idea that something should be left for future generations is one that we would like to share with others. The property has been organic and has composted organic waste since 1988. We have chosen not to grow our own vegetables, but rather to support local farmers and

encourage them to grow organically. We have seen a great response to our needs, as farmers include more variety of produce in the market and make more efforts to stop

using chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

We have tried to avoid having thatched roofs as much as possible, because the palm commonly used for thatching is generally not harvested in a sustainable fashion. The only thatched roofs we have are on our Maya house in the botanic gardens and a palapa on duPlooy's property, and these roofs were constructed from sustainably harvested palms grown on the property.

Q: How are you supporting the local community?

dP:

There is a program at the adjacent **Belize Botanic Gardens** to host local school visits. We support the program in conjunction with the **International Palm Society** and the **Darwin Initiative**. Children visit the gardens and learn about environmental issues as well as the importance of conservation. We have developed an environmental board game, which they play after their walk through the gardens to help them retain what they have learned.

With European Union funding, Belize Botanic Gardens and duPlooy's have initiated a Professional Gardeners' Training Program that offers training to under-employed and unemployed Belizeans. The program emphasizes native plants, organic agriculture, and conservation. We believe there to be a good job market for trained gardeners in Belize, especially within the tourism industry.

Q: Of all the hotels in the area, what makes duPlooy's special?

dP:

At duPlooy's you can have breakfast with aracaris, happy hour with hummingbirds, and dinner with kinkajous on our jungle deck. Our extensive trail system can take you to a cave, upstream to canoe or tube back to duPlooy's beach, or even to the Xunantunich Mayan site.



Guests love our beautiful location on the Macal River with a natural beach as well as our beautiful grounds. There's also our friendly and attentive hotel staff and guides and our delicious healthy food, locally sourced wherever possible. We also have lots of on-site activities - gardens, canoeing, tubing, swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and birding.

Adjacent to the lodge is Belize's only botanic garden, which features a 37-acre (15-hectare) rainforest restoration area, medicinal trail, native orchid house, traditional Maya house, savannah trail, palm exhibit, 30-foot lookout tower, and some of the best bird and nature guides in Belize.

Visit **[duPlooy's profile](#)** on SustainableTrip.org to learn even more about this spectacular hotel!