

New Eco-Lodge Opens in Belize

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A California couple says it's give-back time.

Their way is to open to the public a recently created six-cabana, eco-friendly accommodation called Casa del Caballo Blanco that allows guests to get up close and personal with Belize through its flora and fauna, cultural artifacts, recreation, and its birds migrating through this major flyway.

Casa, a 23-acre former ranch 9.5 miles from the Guatemalan border near San Ignacio, also shelters the not-for-profit Casa Avian Support Alliance. Its purpose is to understand and support the biodiversity of Belize that attracts and sustains over 530 species of migratory and resident birds spotted in a given year.

Jodi and Vance Benté also established The Alliance whose motto is: 'Birds are the farmers of the world - help us to help them continue to sow their seeds.' Their work is in response to Belize's endangered habitat that is threatening ecological biodiversity and the avian population.

'The folks who will most appreciate Casa,' says Jodi Benté, 'are environmentally conscious and, like us, looking for opportunities to make vacation time meaningful.'

ABOUT CASA del CABALLO BLANCO

The Casa's hacienda-style Main House celebrates the region's Hispanic culture with high, beamed ceilings, tile floors, hand-made furniture and interior design features hand-crafted by local artisans to evoke the footprint of an ordered, spiritual world of centuries ago. Nestled on a hillside overlooking the Mopan River Valley, findings indicate that the site may have been a Mayan encampment. The guest quarters, six thatch-roofed, fully screened cabanas, all have en-suite bathrooms, refrigerators, hand-crafted furniture and Mayan-inspired fabrics.

Meals served in an airy, thatch-roofed dining room include Mayan food prepared in centuries-old Kekchi, Mopan and Ycatecan traditions. Creole foods combine exotic Hispanic and Caribbean flavors. All produce is fresh from Casa's own gardens and local markets and prepared locally by Belizeans.

Guests are invited to share in the responsibilities of supporting the avian program. They can assist in nest building, maintenance and feeding as well as trail building and signage. A percentage of each cabana rental will be donated to the CASA center to assist with medical and other expenses related to the management of the facility.

Casa also organizes day-long tours that in addition to an educational and scientific focus can include horseback riding, cave tubing and visiting archeological and World Heritage Sites in Belize and Guatemala.

ABOUT CASA AVIAN SUPPORT ALLIANCE (CASA)

On-site facilities provide a haven for avian wildlife recently freed from captivity or treated for injury or illness. Here birds can heal, rehabilitate and eventually be released back into their natural habitat. It is also a sanctuary for the life-time care of birds that can't be released back to their natural habitat. The facility is dynamic and will evolve annually with the guidance and cooperation of the Forest Department, Belize Audubon Society, Friends for Conservation and Development, Aves Sin Fronteras, and other organizations and experts from the avian community. Visit the alliance website for more information, www.casaavian.org

Lodge guests are also welcome to join its Passport Program that over time will showcase a half dozen other properties in the Americas with organizations who have similar goals and missions such as avian support.

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