

My experience at Bay Islands Conservation Association

By Augusto Gamero



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In February this year, a great opportunity was presented to me to work for BICA (Bay Islands Conservation Association) as scientific coordinator of volunteer programs. From the beginning, I have felt totally committed and I have identified with the goals of the organization to preserve Utila's natural resources.

When I first got to BICA, I was met by Calina Zepeda, Executive Director of BICA, who explained to me the duties and responsibilities of my job. The same day I met two Canadian volunteers, Marina and Shannon, who came to the island to donate their time and knowledge to our valuable reef-monitoring project. I would like to express that it was a great experience to share 28 days with these two wonderful women, with whom I shared the same concerns and interests towards the conservation of the coral reef.

During the training on the reef monitoring methodology, I also met Michel who has been committed as a volunteer to our monitoring program. My experience at BICA has been very gratifying, not only professionally but also for my personal development. I have known extraordinary people such as Mrs. Tonia and CJ Woods, Michel Wilty, Calina, Shannon, Marina and our only current volunteer, Abra Zobel, a 24 year old woman with a charming personality and with a commitment and responsibility to work. When conversation topics are boring she always comes up with trivia questions about marine reptiles, evolution or any rare aspect about nature. I learn a lot from her. These and other people, make my work day by day more rewarding and exciting, from



all of them I learn, I share my knowledge and experience and feeling for conservation towards one of the world's richest natural resources and one on which the economy of Utila relies, the coral reef.

It is gratifying to observe the splendor that lies beneath Utila's crystalline waters, such a small island but at the same time so naturally rich that is usually ignored or taken for granted. Nevertheless, it is sometimes heartrending to observe how irresponsible human activities are affecting these resources; deforestation, over fishing, organic and inorganic matter input, among others. Therefore, it is of great significance to join efforts to mitigate the negative human impacts on this importance resource, and I can say I feel inspired to see how the dive shops are organizing and getting involved in environmental activities that have vital positive outcomes on the people and resources.

Currently, weekly meetings are being held to organize these activities in which dive shops, BICA, Iguana Station, the Municipality and other interested people are participating. I encourage all people or groups to join our environmental efforts.

How many of us have not heard a story from our parents or grandparents saying how beautiful a place used to be? We all hope that our future generations can enjoy the richness of our natural resources instead of regretting our current actions. Remember that making a mistake and not correcting it is another mistake.

If you would like to contribute, please send a note to us at info@bica-utila.org

Think :Smart

Sustainably Managing Aquatic Resources Together

By Jules Page

Tim New and Andy Farmer, an environmental scientist, have gotten together and started a new environmental campaign: Think :Smart. It encompasses different subjects for residents and tourists to Utila to be more ecologically friendly. These subjects are Live :Smart, Eat :Smart, Dive :Smart and Drink :Smart.

Live :Smart

Is about the little things we encounter everyday. It doesn't take a lot of effort but with everybody on Utila taking part, this project can have a huge effect on Utila's ecosystem, hopefully putting a stop to the destruction of the once pristine ecosystem.

Electrical Appliances – Please turn off electrical appliances when not in use, such as light and fans. Utila is powered by diesel; the less burnt the better for the environment and also the better for your pocket and/or the cheaper the hotel will be.

Cigarette butts – Please throw in the bin, it may blow into the ocean and the fish, thinking it might be food, can eat it, which poisons the fish. Unfortunately, this fish may be eaten by a bigger fish and the chain continues.

Re-use – You can limit the amount of rubbish, simply by carrying your groceries in a backpack and limiting the amount of plastic bags that are needed or take a box.

Take Away – Used batteries can NOT be discarded safely on the island (or the mainland). Many dive shops box up used batteries and ask people traveling back to the states to take these little packages with them. Please take a box if you are traveling to a country that has a battery collection station.

Minimize – The amount of water used on Utila by limiting your showers, turning of

the water while brushing your teeth and report leaking faucets and toilets so they can be fixed. Water is a precious commodity and needs saving.

Drink :Smart

This will not only save you money but give you a good feeling inside.

Refill – it's cheap and easy, take your water bottle to one of the dive centers now offering this service.

Buy Big – 5 gallon bottles are cheaper and are re-used but you will need to put down a deposit for the bottle.

Recycle – plastic bottles can be taken to some of the dive centers, where they empty, squash and store the P.E.T. plastic ready to be sent to the mainland for recycling.

Avoid Plastic – buy soft drinks and beer in glass bottles as they are re-used. This comes with a small deposit but when you return the bottle you get your money back.

Dive :Smart

An ongoing theme here on Utila.

Choose your dive shop wisely - ask yourself questions about their environmental practices. Do they display W.S.O.R.C. encounter guidelines? Do they adhere to these guidelines? Do they support the plastic recycling program? During dive boat briefings do they remind divers to be careful of their buoyancy, to not touch the coral and not take anything as a souvenir?

Eat :Smart

Is a very important area of the campaign and will be run in conjunction with restaurants and cafes. There will be more on this in the next months issue.

The THINK :Smart campaign posters will be appearing in restaurants, hotels and dive shops soon. If you would like to get involved please speak to Andy at Cross Creek.

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