

# Esquinas Rainforest Lodge

## Rainforest of the Austrians

Conservation  
Species protection  
Teaching and research  
Sustainable tourism  
Community development



[www.esquinaslodge.com](http://www.esquinaslodge.com)

[www.regenwald.at](http://www.regenwald.at)

# Conservation: Rainforest of the Austrians



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The Esquinas Rainforest with Rio Esquinas in the right foreground and Golfo Dulce and Osa Peninsula in the background  
Photo: Werner Huber

Twenty years ago, the Esquinas Rainforest in southern Costa Rica, one of the most biodiverse jungles in Central America and part of the Osa Biological Corridor around the Golfo Dulce, was severely endangered by logging. The non-profit organization *Rainforest of the Austrians*, founded by the Austrian musician Michael Schnitzler in 1991, has been trying to save this last unprotected lowland tropical forest on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica by purchasing properties and donating them to the Costa Rican National Park Service, after which they become part of Piedras Blancas National Park.

- 1992-2010: purchase of 10,000 acres (15.6 square miles) of forest with the help of donations
- Thousands of nature lovers, including children from 250 Austrian schools, have donated \$3,000,000 for land acquisition
- 39 properties were donated to the Republic of Costa Rica
- 2009: purchase of two farms on the border of Piedras Blancas National Park for reforestation
- More than 16,000 acres were purchased by the Republic of Costa Rica, the Nature Conservancy and Ecoland-Tenaska
- By 2010, 72% of the Esquinas Rainforest had become a national park
- 1995: Michael Schnitzler, chairman of *Rainforest of the Austrians*, receives the Austrian Government Prize for Environment
- 2000: *Rainforest of the Austrians* receives the Binding Prize for Environment (Liechtenstein)
- Honorary Membership of the Costa Rican National Park Service for Michael Schnitzler
- The price of land has increased tenfold from \$0.35/m<sup>2</sup> in 1992 to \$3.50/m<sup>2</sup> in 2011

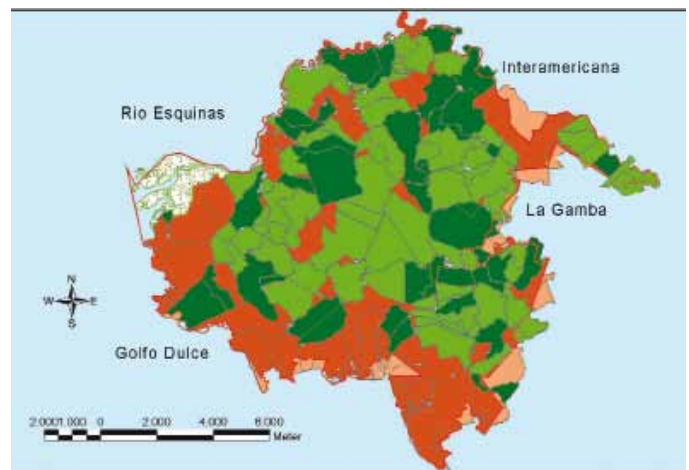


**Piedras Blancas National Park 2011**

dark green area (26%) = purchased by *Rainforest of the Austrians*  
light green area (46%) = purchased by other organizations  
red area (28%) = not yet purchased



Playa San Josecito



# Species protection



Next to purchasing land with the goal of saving the Esquinas rainforest, *Rainforest of the Austrians* is also trying to protect the land from illegal loggers and hunters, reintroduce endangered species, and conserve the area's endangered wildcat population. Conservation efforts are being implemented in close cooperation with the National Park Service and local NGOs. Since 1998, the organization has donated \$275,000 towards species protection in the Esquinas Rainforest.



Zoo Ave release site in San Josecito

- 1996-1998: support of the NGO Profelis (reintroduction program for ocelots and margays)
- 1998: donation of 32 acres to Zoo Ave for an animal release station site
- 1998-2008: support of the NGO „Fundación de Restauración de la Naturaleza“ (reintroduction project for scarlet macaws and squirrel monkeys)
- Since 1998, 120 scarlet macaws and hundreds of parrots have been reintroduced into the Esquinas Rainforest
- Since 2003: yearly donation of two park warden's salaries to the Corcovado Foundation for Piedras Blancas National Park
- Since 2009: support of the Yaguará Wildcat Conservation Organization (purchase of camera traps and GPS radio collars, payment of compensation to farmers, environmental education)
- 2009 Construction of an operation center for park wardens in La Gamba



Aida Bustamante of Yaguará with ocelot



Michael Schnitzler with park rangers at La Gamba ranger station

## Biodiversity



96 mammal species (including five wildcat species, four monkey species and 53 species of bats) exist in the Esquinas rainforest. Also, 37 amphibian species, 42 reptile species and 319 bird species have been recorded. In 2010, a camera trap recorded this jaguar in Valle Bonito.

Biologists have counted 2400 species of plants (including 120 endemic plants and 45 species of palm) and a tree density of 140 species per hectare. The whole Osa area contains 600 tree species - ten times more than in all Europe.



# Teaching and Research: La Gamba Field Station



The only existing Austrian field station in the tropics, La Gamba Field Station, was founded in 1993 by *Rainforest of the Austrians* in cooperation with the University of Vienna. It offers students, researchers, scholars and amateur biologists an ideal environment to study and come to understand the fascinating and complex ecosystem of a tropical rainforest. Until 2010, Rainforest of the Austrians has spent more than \$700,000 on infrastructure, construction, scholarships, publications and reforestation.



- 1993-1996: build-up of an international field station for tropical biology
- 1996: *Rainforest of the Austrians* purchases 15 acres of rainforest near the station for research purposes
- 2000: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge donates 12 acres to the field station for a botanical garden
- 1993-2005: La Gamba Field Station owned by *Rainforest of the Austrians*
- 2006: transfer of the station to the society „Friends of La Gamba Field Station“ under the auspices of the University of Vienna
- Numerous publications, seminars, field trips, courses, films, exhibitions
- More than 70 masters and bachelors theses
- Accommodation for 30 persons, kitchen, dining area, laboratory, library
- Projects in La Gamba and surroundings (permaculture, biological corridor, scholarships for schoolchildren, exhibitions)
- Since 2008: reforestation of thousands of rainforest trees in cooperation with *Rainforest of the Austrians* and OMV oil and gas company



[www.lagamba.at](http://www.lagamba.at)



# Sustainable Tourism: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge



Eco-friendly Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, surrounded on three sides by the dense rainforest of Piedras Blancas National Park, is 100% carbon-neutral and was listed as one of Costa Rica's top five ecolodges by the 2009 „Lonely Planet Guidebook“. It was built as a development aid project financed by the Republic of Austria. The goal was to offer the local people an alternative to the destruction of the rainforest. By now, Esquinas has become the largest employer in La Gamba. It is the only lodge in Piedras Blancas National Park that is accessible by car all year round.



- 1994: construction of Esquinas Rainforest Lodge
- 1995-1998: owned by the Austrian government
- 1999-2005: owned by *Rainforest of the Austrians*
- Since 2005: run as a privately-owned non-profit ecotourism project
- 16-23 jobs for the people of La Gamba, depending on season
- Neutralization of yearly emission of 29 tons of carbon dioxide through the reforestation of 2334 rainforest trees from 40 species in La Gamba
- Wastewater treatment plant for kitchen sewage
- Waste separation and recycling of glass, plastic and aluminum
- Microbiotic septic tanks
- Natural swimming pool without chemicals or pumps
- Biodegradable soaps, shampoos and cleaning agents
- Compost system with worm culture
- Organic fruit, vegetable and herb garden
- 16 guest rooms; nature trails, horseback riding and bike tours; boat and kayak excursions in Golfo Dulce
- Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST)



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Ana Catalina Torres Portela, indispensable general manager since 1998, receives the Certification for Sustainable Tourism from Costa Rica's president Oscar Arias

# Social Projects in La Gamba



Meeting between town residents and Michael Schnitzler



La Gamba



Michael Schnitzler with the La Gamba soccer team

Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, *Rainforest of the Austrians* and La Gamba Field Station are closely connected with the community of La Gamba. The La Gamba Fund, created by Michael Schnitzler, supports public welfare projects in the village with the objective of bettering the living standard of the population. Proposals from local residents are carried out in accord with local committees. By 2010, the La Gamba Fund had invested \$200,000 in community projects.



- 1995-2005: community projects financed and implemented by the Austrian Development Aid Cooperation
- Establishment of town committees and implementation of agricultural and social projects
- 2005: creation of the La Gamba Fund
- Restoration of the potable water system for 70 houses in La Gamba
- Renovation and furnishing of the school and the community hall
- Construction of a police station, a health center and a town office
- Construction of a covered playground
- Support of school and sport activities through the La Gamba Fund and La Gamba Field Station
- Thanks to an initiative by La Gamba Field Station and the support of godparents in Austria, 20 children from La Gamba can attend secondary school

## Who is Michael Schnitzler?



Michael Schnitzler, grandson of the poet and playwright Arthur Schnitzler, was concertmaster of the Vienna Symphony from 1967 to 1983 and professor of violin at Vienna Music University from 1982 to 2006. Since 1965, he has been violinist of the Haydn Trio Vienna, with which he has toured the world and made numerous recordings. To date, he has played more than 3000 concerts.

Michael Schnitzler's big passion is traveling in unspoiled nature. On his search for the world's last paradises, he visited Costa Rica in 1989 and discovered his love for tropical rainforests. He bought a house on Playa Cacao near Golfito, and Costa Rica became his second home. In view of the advancing destruction of the surrounding forests, he soon became a convinced environmentalist and founded the NGO *Rainforest of the Austrians* with the goal of saving the Esquinas rainforest and preserving its biodiversity. Since 1991, he has raised almost \$5,000,000. After purchasing Esquinas Rainforest Lodge in 2005, Michael Schnitzler has become increasingly involved in development and welfare projects in La Gamba.

