

# The Toledo Howler

Newspaper of the Toledo Chapter of the Belize Tourism Industry Association

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2011

YEAR 4, ISSUE 3

**FREE**

## Zip Line Coming to Toledo

## Cacao Fest 2011

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Toledo BTIA's newest member is Andrew Caliz the owner of Las Faldas bar and restaurant on the banks of the Rio Grande next to the bridge in Big Falls village.

Now The Howler does not normally write about projects which have yet to happen but in this case we are making an exception. Las Faldas has one of the nicest locations in the district with views over the Rio Grande falls but even more exciting is the planned zip line that Andrew and his partner David Franco are constructing at the time of writing.

This should be a great draw for visitors to Toledo, becoming only the third zip line in Belize after the ones at Jaguar Paw and Calico Jack's in Cayo. Construction of this one will be to the same standards as the other two. Zip lines are always popular and this one should attract tour operators and groups from Placencia and Hopkins as well as visitors staying in Toledo.

A total run of about two and a half thousand feet is planned, in six or seven sections, with a landing and launching platform at each tree stop along the way. It will cross the Rio Grande once along the way.

A zip line has been on Toledo BTIA's wish list for development of the destination and we keenly await it's completion. The opening is planned for the end of March and the Howler will be featuring a full article on its launch in the next issue.

**Contact:**  
Andrew Caliz [dehsino@yahoo.com](mailto:dehsino@yahoo.com) or 674-8368

David Franco 631-3497

The Howler can confirm that the Cacao Festival for 2011 is definitely on, despite any rumours to the contrary and will be as entertaining as ever. The dates are set for the weekend of May 20-22. It will be packed with exciting events and activities for young and old alike, not only to pay tribute to the finest organic cacao grown by local Mayan villagers, but also to honor Ek Chuah, the ancient Mayan god of merchants and cacao.

Friday night opens with the classy Wine and Chocolate Evening with music by one of Belize's foremost singers, Nelita Castillo and will be held for the first time at the Coral House Inn.

Saturday's festivities will feature the town of Punta Gorda and the natural wonders of the district. Visitors and townies will have a map and list of events around town that will include music in Central Park, the morning market, a cacao center at Cotton Tree Chocolate in town, a tour of the fire house, a chance to sit inside a Tropic Air plane, a tortilla making exhibition at the Fajina Centre, an art exhibit and an arche-



Face painting in PG Central Park, Cacao Fest 2010

© JC Cuellar Photography—jccuellar.com

ology exhibit and art display sponsored by NICH.

*Continued on page 4*



BTIA's distinctive octagonal Information Center on Front street in Punta Gorda. All you need to know about Toledo is inside

Join BTIA and display your promotional materials in the information center.

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**Contact Toledo BTIA** at the Tourism Information Center, Front St., Punta Gorda Tel. 722-2531  
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# Destinations: San Miguel



Sign by the bridge at San Miguel. One of the project's shelters is visible behind the sign. The words at the bottom of the sign read "Let's join hands for a healthier river eco-system"

Travellers to the village of San Miguel in the heart of Toledo district may have noticed the way the village has been busy replanting trees along the banks of the Rio Grande. This is all part of a project to protect the environment and to help increase the fish population in the river.

The Howler visited San Miguel and spoke to Alberto Cal who is effectively the project manager and has been involved since the project's inception going back about ten years.

Alberto explained that when he was a child he remembers leaning over the bridge or wandering along the river bank and being able to see dozens of machaca, tuba and snook in the water. These days he says you would be lucky to see any fish at all. In the past nobody used nets, or spear guns or diving masks and over-fishing with this type of equipment has brought the fish population close to extinction. But it is not all about fish alone since the project also has other strands.

Alberto has always been aware of the need to gain the commitment of the village in order for a project like

this to succeed and when the idea was originally presented to the village there was general agreement and Alberto himself was asked to form a group to co-ordinate activities. A board was formed including a teacher, medical student, member of the BDF and students studying for a degree in Natural Resource Management. The project is called Ka'kalenel Kar Si' Nima' which translates literally as "river fish watcher" Early small grants were used for garbage collection and river cleaning.

It was not until about three years ago that a leap forward was made with help from TIDE (Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment) which gave soil and grow bags to create a nursery for saplings to replant the river bank. TIDE also helped with the proposal which successfully applied for a grant with the aim of demarcating the sixty-six feet of Crown Land and planting trees along the river bank, clearing a trail on the south bank leading up to Tiger Cave and building shelters along the route for hikers visiting the cave. Ya'axche Conservation Trust also donated around five hun-

dred trees.

All this has been achieved and the village wants to welcome visitors to Toledo who want to explore the caves. The bank is lined with young bribri (*inga*), cedar, mahogany and cotton trees (*ceiba*) among other species. The trail is complete although the group want to build bridges to cross six small creeks coming into the river. Right now hikers still need to scramble across. The bridge construction will form part of a second phase project. They would like to section the river so that there are stretches where fishing is not allowed at all and others where fishing is allowed but with a line only. They would also like to set aside other parts of the river for students to use for educational research.

While most readers are likely to agree that this is unquestionably a good thing, the project has had many ups and downs and support from the whole village has not always been forthcoming. One man's "conservation" is another's "restrictions on traditional use". And now that the trail has opened up areas that were previously difficult to access there is a need for vigilance to ensure that gains made by reforestation on the river bank are not wiped out by loss of other resources.

Everyone involved in the project has to be congratulated for their willingness to be involved and determination to see it through. Alberto emphasizes the need to gain the willing co-operation of as many of the community as possible.

Visitors or tour operators wanting to use the trail are recommended to contact either Alberto Cal or Kenny Cal who can arrange for a trail guide.

Contact:

Alberto Cal 623-9361 or Kenny Cal 620-2594

## Maya Day 2011

Maya Day which has until now been held towards the end of March will this year take place on the weekend of May 14-15.

Tumul K'in the organizers of the festival for the past few years promise that the event will be an international occasion with participation from Guatemala and Honduras. Tumul K'in will be hosting the 11th Encuentro Maya with representatives from Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. That event will include discussion of indigenous and women's rights as well as 2012 end of the

Mayan long calendar.

Public events on Sunday 15 May will include the Cortez Dance.

Previous celebrations have included enactments of the ancient Mayan Ball game as well as performance of traditional Maya dances.

*Further details will be published in the next edition of The Toledo Howler in April.*

## Belize Named #1 Up-And-Coming Honeymoon Destination By BRIDES Magazine



The Belize Tourism Board (BTB) is pleased to announce that Brides Magazine and Signature Travel Network has named Belize the #1 up-and-coming honeymoon destination in *BRIDES* March issue. *BRIDES* Magazine reaches over 6.5 million readers per issue and is published 12 times a year by Conde Nast.

“Promoting our romantic getaways has been one of our top marketing priorities for the last two years, so we’re pleased that our country has received such a distinguished recognition,” said Seleni Matus, Director of Tourism for the BTB. “This nomination is truly a testament to the success of our Belize in Love campaign and hard work and support from our Private Sector partners, who go above and beyond to ensure couples have the romantic escape that they’ve

always dreamt of.”

The Belize in Love initiative, first launched in 2009, is an effort that promotes the country’s vast array of offerings for couples planning destination weddings and honeymoons, anniversaries and other romantic getaways. Among efforts throughout the years, the BTB has hosted numerous journalists from top wedding and honeymoon publications covering romantic travel in Belize including such prominent outlets as *Destination Weddings & Honeymoons*, *Modern Bride*, *Cosmo*, *About.com* and *Real Simple*, in March 2009, as well as a Blogger Press Trip in November 2009.

In July 2010, the campaign kicked into high gear with the launch of a new, interactive site called [Belize In Love](http://BelizeInLove.com), which is accessed through the BTB’s official tourism website, [TravelBelize.org](http://TravelBelize.org). Serving as a primary source for couples planning wedding and romantic escapes in Belize, the [Belize In Love](http://BelizeInLove.com) site has become a go-to resource for lovebirds seeking tips on romantic outings, expert advice on planning trips, information on wedding licenses and more. Among its most popular feature, the “[Romance Specials](#)” sec-

tion is raved as one of the most helpful tools because it allows travelers to hone in on specific romance packages and deals from hoteliers throughout the country.

A group of more than 6,000 top travel agents were polled; full findings about Belize’s ranking as the #1 up-and-coming honeymoon destination will be revealed in the magazine’s annual Best Honeymoons Award survey, which was conducted through the Signature Travel Network.



*BRIDES* was the first wedding magazine and has remained the most widely read wedding magazine in the world. Signature Travel Network is a member-owned, travel cooperative with 191 member agencies and 365 retail locations throughout the U.S. and Canada.



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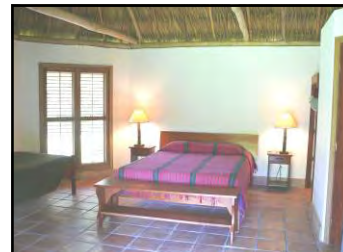
Refresh



Rediscover



Renew



### Toledo Belize on the Web *Find out more at these web sites*

[www.southernbelize.com](http://www.southernbelize.com) which calls itself the “#1 source of information about southern Belize”. This may no longer be true since it has not been updated for some time and does not take account of infrastructural improvements that make the district very easily accessible by bus, car or plane. But there is plenty of good information here too.

[www.travelbelize.org/destinations/destinations/toledo.html](http://www.travelbelize.org/destinations/destinations/toledo.html) The site of the BTB with links to pages about national parks, Mayan sites and areas of natural beauty.

## Restaurant Guide

Name	Address	Cuisine	Phone	Opening Hours
Coleman's Cafe	Big Falls Village, near the rice mill	Belizean	720-2017	Daily: 11:30- 4pm & 6- 9pm [ Reservations Preferred ]
Fajina Firehearth Food	Front St, PG	Local Mayan Food	666-6144	Mon-Sat: 7am-7:30pm. Closed on Sundays
Gomier's Restaurant and Soy Centre	Alejandro Vernon St, near PG welcome sign	Local & international vegetarian / Seafood	722-2929	Mon-Sat: 8am-2pm & 6-9pm. Closed Sundays
Grace's Restaurant	Main St. PG	Belizean/ International	702-2414	Daily: 6am-10pm, including holidays
Hang Cheong Restaurant	Main St, PG	Chinese	722-2064	Daily: 10am-2pm & 5pm-midnight
The Lodge at Big Falls	Big Falls Village, near the rice mill	International/ Belizean/ Middle Eastern	671-7172	Daily: 11:30am - 2pm & 6:30 - 9pm [ Reservations Required ]
Machaca Hill Lodge	Wilson's Road	Pan Central American and International	722-0050	Lunch: noon-2:30pm. Dinner: 7:30-10pm. [Reservations preferred]
Marian's Bay View Restaurant	Front St, south of the market by the sea	East Indian/ Belizean	722-0129	Mon-Sat: 11am - 2pm & 6 - 10pm Sun & Hols: noon - 2pm & 7 - 9pm
Martina's Kitchen	BTL parking lot, PG	Belizean	623-3330	Mon-Sat: 7am-3pm. Closed on Sundays
Rainbow Cafe	Queen St, PG, by the park	Belizean	631-2309	Mon-Sat: 7am-2pm. Closed on Sundays
Sho's Local Restaurant	Entrance to Blue Creek Village	Belizean/ Catering	668-6540	Mon-Sat: 7am-8pm. Closed Sundays. Group reservations required
The Snack Shack	BTL parking lot, PG	Breakfast & lunch/ Snacks, shakes, juices & pastries	702-0020	Mon-Sat: 7am - 3pm. Closed Sundays

A listing in the Restaurant Guide costs BZ\$30 for a year (4 issues) or \$10 per issue. Please contact the BTIA Tourism Information Office on 722-2531 for more information and to let us know if any of the details in your listing change.

## Wat's Cookin'?

### Machaca Spiced Hot Chocolate Mix

#### Ingredients

- ◆ 12 cups granulated sugar
- ◆ 6 pound Belizean/Mayan chocolate – can be a mix of chocolate types including bitersweet and semi-sweet and a small amount of unsweetened.
- ◆ 3 cups (or 24 small packets) cocoa powder
- ◆ 24 cinnamon sticks
- ◆ 12 teaspoons ground cinna-

mon

- ◆ 3-6 teaspoon ground habanero powder
- ◆ 6 teaspoons nutmeg

#### Method

Place sugar in a large bowl. Mix ground cinnamon, nutmeg and ground pepper into sugar until well incorporated.

In food processor fitted with metal blade, process hard chocolates until finely ground, using 4-second pulses. (Process in two or three batches if necessary.)

Add ground chocolate and cocoa powder to sugar and whisk to blend.

Place 1 cinnamon stick into each jar before adding mixture.

Spoon mix into 16 oz (pint size) jars.

**Yield** 24 16 oz jars.

#### To serve

For each serving, heat 8 ounces milk in small saucepan over medium heat until simmering. Whisk in 3-4 tablespoons mix into milk. Continue to heat until chocolate and sugar are completely dissolved. Serve warm or chill for cold chocolate milk.

*Recipe donated by Machaca Hill Lodge.*

## Cacao Fest

*continued from Page 1*

The archaeological display will be held in the Special Events Centre attached to the Town Council offices by the airstrip. There will also be a fine arts display of work by Belizean artists. There will be a variety of tours to the cayes, nearby Mayan ruins and inland cacao trails by the Cacao Association.

Saturday evening activities include

delicious chocolate dinners at nearby lodges plus Culture and Harmony performances at local venues.

Sunday is the grand finale set in the mystic environment of Lubantuun, Place of Fallen Stone, featuring a special performance by one of Mexico's dance companies, a talk by an archeologist specializing in ancient Mayan history, a walking tour of the site, and in concert, the exciting steel bands, the Pantempliers and the Panerrifix.

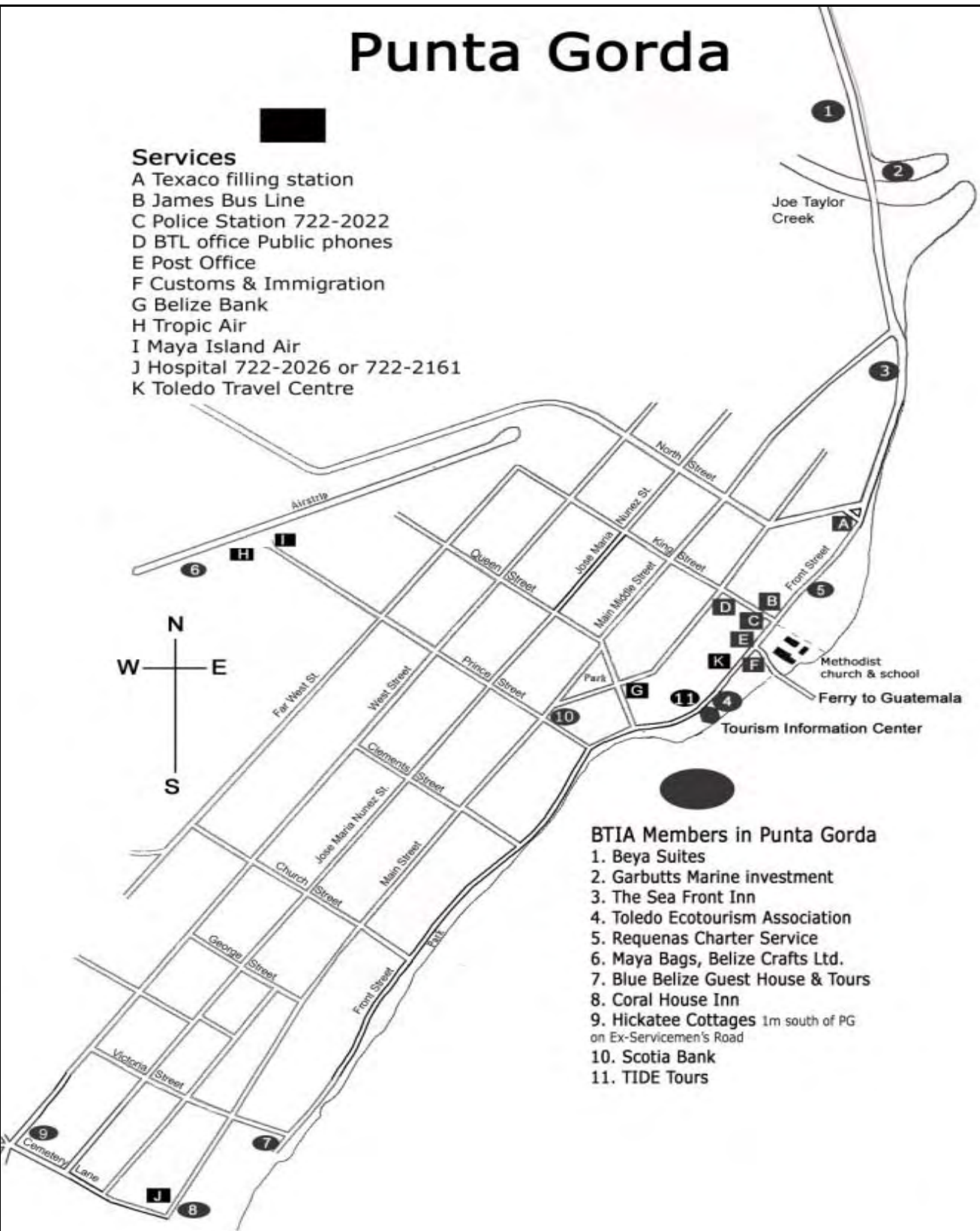


*There will be plenty of mouth watering food!*

# Punta Gorda

## Services

- A Texaco filling station
- B James Bus Line
- C Police Station 722-2022
- D BTL office Public phones
- E Post Office
- F Customs & Immigration
- G Belize Bank
- H Tropic Air
- I Maya Island Air
- J Hospital 722-2026 or 722-2161
- K Toledo Travel Centre



## BTIA Members in Punta Gorda

- 1. Beya Suites
- 2. Garbutts Marine investment
- 3. The Sea Front Inn
- 4. Toledo Ecotourism Association
- 5. Requenas Charter Service
- 6. Maya Bags, Belize Crafts Ltd.
- 7. Blue Belize Guest House & Tours
- 8. Coral House Inn
- 9. Hickatee Cottages 1m south of PG on Ex-Servicemen's Road
- 10. Scotia Bank
- 11. TIDE Tours

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## BTIA TOLEDO MEMBERS 2011

Business Name	Email	Phone	Contact Person
Belize Crafts Ltd, Maya Bags	belizeexecutivedirector@mayabags.org	722-2175	Desiree Arnold
Beya Suites	info@beyasuites.com	722-2188	Lisa Avila
Blue Belize Guest House & Tours	info@bluebelize.com	722-2678	Dan Castellanos & Rachel Graham
Coral House Inn	coralhousebelize@yahoo.com	722-2878	Rick & Darla Mallory
Cotton Tree Lodge	chris@cottontreelodge.com	670-0557	Chris Crowell
Chrisbel Perez	cuxlinha@live.com	630-7673	Chris Perez
Cuxlin Ha Retirement Village	cuxlinha@hotmail.com	614-2518	Dona Lee Scafe
Dem Dats Doin	demdatsdoin@btl.net	722-2470	Yvonne Villoria
Fajina Craft Center of Belize	fajina.craft.center@gmail.com	666-6141	Candelaria Pop
Garbutt's Marine Investment Co.	garbuttsmarine@yahoo.com	604-3548	Dennis Garbutt
Hickatee Cottages	cottages@hickatee.com	662-4475	Ian & Kate Morton
Las Faldas	dehsino@yahoo.com	674-8368	Andrew Caliz
Lodge at Big Falls	info@thelodgeatbigfalls.com	671-7172 / 614-2888	Marta & Rob Hirons
Machaca Hill Lodge	info@machacahill.com	722-0050	Brian Gardiner
Maya Ant and Bee Group	mayaantandbee@gmail.com	662-1139	Ofelia Cal
Requena's Charter Service	watertaxi@btl.net	722-2070	Julio Requena
Romero's Charter Service	rcharters@btl.net	722-2625/2924	Francis Romero
Scotia Bank	roxanna.aleman@scotiabank.com	722-0098/0099	Roxanna Aleman
The Sea Front Inn	larry@seafrentinn.com	722-2300	Larry & Carol Smith
Sun Creek Lodge	suncreek@hughes.net	604-2124/ 665-6778	Bruno Kuppinger
TIDE Tours	info@tidetours.org	722-2129	Delonie Foreman
Toledo Eco-Tourism Association	teabelize@googlemail.com	702-2119	Vicente Sackul / Reyes Chun
Toledo Tour Guides Association	ttgabze@gmail.com	660-3974	Dennis Garbutt
Tranquility Lodge	info@tranquility-lodge.com	677-9921	Sheila & Rusty Nale
Tumul K'in Center of Learning	tumulkin_tourism@yahoo.com	608-1070	Rosemary Salam

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# Botanical Research in Bladen Reserve

The Howler has written before about the Itzama garden at BITI on the banks of Golden Stream. During December and January Graduate student researchers Sophia Colantonio and Jonathan Ferrier were in Belize to finalize research on plant medicines used by the K'ekchi' Maya. Jonathan emphasizes the way in which the outside researchers and the local healers complement each other. When in the forest the healers are able to identify rare plants while the visitors can help to identify them. Jonathan writes about their work below.

“With Belize Indigenous Training Institute (BITI) and K'ekchi' Maya healers, University of Ottawa students are guided by their Belize partners and their professor Dr. Thor Arnason. Arnason's mandate is to help protect the Ke'kchi' way of traditional healing by working

aply named, *Itzama*, after the Maya goddess of medicine.



Mayan healers in the Bladen Nature Reserve

*Itzama* garden, is located along the Golden Stream in Indian Creek, ten minutes from Big Falls. Under the constant care of Maya healers, the garden is growing in diversity, and is home to many of Belize's featured birds and insects, with a troop of resident howler monkeys. The important feature of *Itzama* however is that the garden thrives as a living mosaic of vines and lianas flowering to the canopy of the tree tops which support orchids and other epiphytes, all creating the deadfall for the garden's fungi. *Itzama* is a living piece of Maya antiquity by serving as the pharmacy for *Itzama's* Maya healers.

Maya medicine grows about a collection of habitats that can be found throughout Belize: limestone slopes and clay forest floors, inland swales and swamps, rivers, epiphytic and scandent across trees, and cultivated on the *Milpa*. Because the It-

*zama* garden is naturally composed of these habitats, it is an excellent location to find an extremely diverse plant collection from Maya pharmacopoeia. In fact, many of the rare plants within *Itzama* have been rescued from slash and burn sites, a contributor to Belizean deforestation and cultural habitat loss.

For researchers the Maya garden is a fantastic location to base studies of ethnobotany and ethnopharmacology. Focusing on contemporary health care items like pain and inflammation, neurologic and dermatologic conditions and symptoms of diabetes can, not only treat pandemic diseases and conditions, but also demonstrate the incredible importance of traditional knowledge in modern medicine. When medical plant extracts used for millennia by healers are demonstrated safe and effective within the chemical and biological research lab, they are quite often more effective with less side effects than regularly prescribed pharmaceuticals. But the message is not that one treatment is better than the other; the message is that they belong together, integrated respectfully in national healthcare systems. When this happens the forests' safety will be secured, and mankind will be healthier for it.

Recently we conducted a research expedition with Mayan healers into the nearby Bladen Nature Preserve. The goal was to exercise the minds of healers with plants that have been destroyed by deforestation elsewhere. Here they were able to photograph and discover rare plants that were not in flower elsewhere preventing their scientific identification. “ This is an long established and continuing relationship and future visits are planned.



Jolom chakmut and flower shot for scientific identification

with the healers and helping them develop their collaborative garden,

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## TRANSPORT SCHEDULES

### Schedule of Flights from Punta Gorda To Belize City and from Belize City To Punta Gorda

Flights stop at Placencia & Dangriga

Depart Punta Gorda	Arrive In Belize City	Service Provider	Depart Belize City	Arrive In Punta Gorda	Service Provider
6:45am	7:45am	Maya Island Air	8:00am	9:00am	Maya Island Air
7:00am	8:10am	Tropic Air	8:30am	9:30am	Tropic Air
9:30am	10:30am	Maya Island Air	10:00am	11:00am	Maya Island Air
9:40am	10:50am	Tropic Air	10:30am	11:30am	Tropic Air
11:30am	12:30pm	Maya Island Air	12:30pm	1:30pm	Tropic Air
11:35am	12:40pm	Tropic Air	2:30pm	3:30pm	Tropic Air
1:35pm	2:45pm	Tropic Air	2:30pm	3:50pm	Maya Island Air
4:00pm	5:00pm	Maya Island Air	4:30pm	5:30pm	Maya Island Air
4:00pm	5:00pm	Tropic Air	4:50am	6:00pm	Tropic Air

### Schedule of Buses leaving Punta Gorda

Departs from Punta Gorda	Arrives in Belize City	Service Provider	Type of Service
3:50am	10:30am	James Bus Line	Regular
4:50am	11:30am	James Bus Line	Regular
5:50am	12:30pm	James Bus Line	Regular
6:00am	10:45am	James Bus Line	Express
7:50am	2:30pm	James Bus Line	Regular
9:50am	4:30pm	James Bus Line	Regular
11:50am	6:30pm	James Bus line	Regular
1:50pm	8:30pm	James Bus Line	Regular
2:50pm	9:30pm	James Bus Line	Regular
3:50pm	9:15pm	James Bus Line	Regular

### Boats To & From Puerto Barrios , Guatemala

Service Provider	Dep. Punta Gorda	Arrive in Puerto Barrios	Dep. Puerto Barrios	Arrive in Punta Gorda
Requena's Charter Service	9:30am	10:30am	2:00pm	3:00pm
Pichilingo	2:00pm	3:00pm	10:00am	11:00am
Marisol	4:00pm	5:00pm	1:00pm	3:00pm
Memo's	1:00pm	2:00pm	3:15pm	4:15pm

Boats to Livingston depart on Tuesdays and Fridays at 10 a.m.

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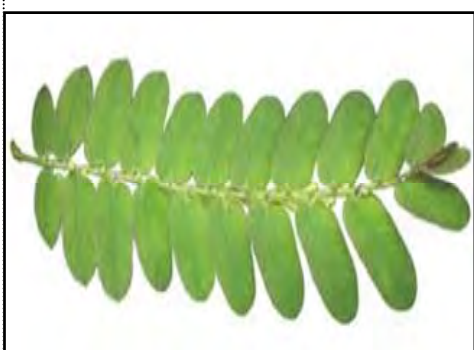




# Arzu on Medicinal Plants: Break-Stone

Break-Stone (*Phyllanthus niruri*) is a green small annual herb growing no more than 60 centimeters tall. Behind the stem of its feathered leaves are set straight rows of wart like seeds, which fall off easily. The leaves close at night and open in daylight. You can find this plant in every region of Belize, as well as in all the tropical regions of planet earth, but even more so in the moist and shady places of the rain forest. It prefers to grow in the shade. The best Chanca Piedra plants to use for medicine are the ones found growing near water, on riverbanks and in ditches.

Historically, traditional healers around the globe have used Chanca Piedra to treat a wide variety of medical conditions. They use it as a



diuretic to remove excess fluid and uric acid from the body, to treat gout, prostate disorders, and all infections specific to the urinary tract system. Some herbalists use it for de-worming of the intestinal tract. However, the main use and definite purpose of this medicinal plant is in its most popular name, Chanca Piedra (Stone Breaker). This name derived from two words in two different languages;

"Chanca" meaning "to break" (Quechua) and "Piedra" meaning "stone" (Spanish). In Belize and other parts of the Caribbean, they call it "Seed in Back", because of the way it carries its seed in the back of the leaves. It is also known as Breakstone, Shatter-stone, and Stonebreaker; clearly all rightfully acquired names.



"Chanca pedra" with seeds visible on the back of leaves

Amongst traditional folk and indigenous healers the herb is known for its outstanding ability to break up and expel kidney stones, gallstones, and bladder stones inside of two weeks time. Chanca Piedra is a powerful plant ally in helping to promote and maintain optimal kidney, gall bladder, liver, and bladder health. Naturopaths are now recommending Chanca Piedra as an alternative to gallbladder removal. Research done in Brazil in 1984 on Chanca Piedra revealed a chemical in the leaves and stems that served as a relaxing agent for smooth muscles and they concluded that this action probably accounted for the efficacy of Chanca Piedra in expelling stones. In Europe, Chanca Piedra is the main ingredient of a pharmaceutical product called Pilosuryl, which sells as diuretic and liver support.

Traditional Stone Removal with Chanca Piedra The entire (roots, leaves, stem, and seeds) plant is hand shredded and boiled. Boil two ounces of dry plant material in two liters of water until it is one liter, and strain. Use four ounces if you have fresh plant material. Drink 16 ounces of this decoction per day in small (4oz) amounts four times daily. Do this for two weeks or until stones are passed and/or condition clears. You may add an ounce of yellow ginger to the mix for more potency, and some limejuice for taste.

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# Southern Voices

Florence "Flo" Johnson



Flo Johnson was born in Punta Gorda and has lived here all her life. Her mother and maternal grandparents were originally from Guyana; her father was born in Corozal town but grew up in PG. Flo attended Peter Claver primary school and later Claver College. She returned to Punta Gorda after two years at St John's Junior College in Belize City and taught at Claver College for 8 years. Flo and Arthur Johnson married in 1971 and have three daughters. Flo runs a stationery business in PG.

1. **What are the most significant changes you have seen in Toledo in your lifetime?** The biggest change is how much PG has grown. Also lifestyles have changed so much. People used to do more communally, like organizing variety shows and church socials, but no one seems to want to do that anymore. Television, facebook and other things like that have taken over people's leisure time.
2. **Are you optimistic about the development of tourism in Toledo?** I guess I'm old fashioned because I would like to see the cayes and other beautiful areas remain pristine and not be developed. I think tourism can be a good thing but in small numbers. I would not like to see a big increase in tourism here, like there has been in some parts of the country, because I think it would mean the destruction of the places that make Toledo so uniquely beautiful.
3. **What could Government do to promote tourism to Toledo?** First of all the government should invest more to improve the roads in Toledo. That would benefit both locals and tourists. Also the government could do more to help small businesses, like making access to loans easier for local entrepreneurs.

neers. Promoting projects such as showcasing local ethnic foods would help keep our culture alive for both locals and visitors.

4. **What can PG Town Council do to support tourism?** The Council could initiate beautification projects in PG to encourage people to make their properties more attractive. I think this would increase a sense of civic pride which has been lost and of course make the town more attractive to tourists. In the past, people had hibiscus hedges on their properties which served two purposes: it made their front yards look lovely and could also be used to lay their wash on to dry. Encouraging civic pride through anti-litter campaigns would also be something the Council could do.
5. **Reef or rainforest?** I prefer the rainforest because I'm terrified of being in a boat in rough seas and I know it can be rough going out to the Sapodillas. Also it's so expensive now to go out to the reef because of the price of gas. Families used to regularly go to the cayes for the day but can't afford to do that now.
6. **If a tourist has time to visit just one place in Toledo, where would you suggest?** I think Rio Blanco is very beautiful so that would be my suggestion.
7. **Which is your favorite month or season in Toledo?** Easter is my favorite time because families come together from all over the country to barbeque and enjoy each other's company.
8. **What is your most memorable experience with a wild animal?** I remember once seeing a water dog (river otter) trapped in a drainage ditch at the culvert by the Y, where the dollar sign is. That culvert used to be called 'Maria Manuela'. The otter was trying desperately to get away from some people who were chasing it and throwing stones at it. I think it did finally make its way to the sea. This was the first time I had seen this animal up close and it was quite beautiful.
9. **What is your favorite Belizean dish?** Split peas with rice. This is a traditional Creole dish with herbs and spices though I prefer it without pig tail. Also black-eyed peas which are traditionally eaten at the New Year. Another favorite dish is conquntay which is a porridge made from dried bananas or plantain and is very nutritious.
10. **Do you have any plans for the future which you can share with us?** I would like to build a retreat center to be used by churches, youth groups and other members of the community. I own land in the VOA area and I think it is an ideal spot for a retreat center. *Thank you Flo!*

## Where to get your copy of The Toledo Howler

- ◆ BTIA Tourist Information Center, Front St in Punta Gorda
- ◆ Tropic Air and Maya Island Air terminals throughout Belize
- ◆ Business premises of BTIA members in Toledo (see list page 8).
- ◆ Tropic Air office in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.
- ◆ Requena's Charters office in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

- ◆ Placencia Tourist information Center, Placencia Village
- ◆ Gas stations on Southern and Western Highway
- ◆ Online at:  
[www.belizefirst.com](http://www.belizefirst.com);  
[www.ecoclub.com](http://www.ecoclub.com);  
[www.ambergriscaye.com](http://www.ambergriscaye.com)  
[www.expatsbelize.com](http://www.expatsbelize.com)  
[www.thelodgeatbigfalls.com](http://www.thelodgeatbigfalls.com)  
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## What's New: update from our members

Over the past year, some of our BTIA members have made improvements to their properties or services. Here's a peek at what's new in the district.



*New casita bedroom at Tranquility Lodge*

Tranquility Lodge in Jacintoville has added three new thatched casitas, beautifully set within their jungle garden. Tranquility now has a total of seven rooms. The owners, Sheila and Rusty Nale are also opening a new trail along Jacinto Creek for better viewing of birds and

howler monkeys.



*Coral House Inn Pool*

Coral House Inn located in Punta Gorda has recently upgraded their swimming pool. Already elegant, the pool is now fully tiled inside and edged with handsome coping stone.

*Continued on Page 12*

## Members update *continued from Page 11*



*Bedroom area in Motmot, one of the new cabanas at The Lodge at Big Falls*

The Lodge at Big Falls completed two new cabanas just before Christmas, bringing their total to eight. The new cabanas each have two queen beds, spacious en suite bathroom, kitchenette and dining area, air conditioning and private verandah. Kitchenettes come equipped with refrigerator, two burner stove, double sink, microwave and plenty of storage area. Weekly and monthly rates are available.

Hickatee Cottages has also increased their lodging capacity with a new cottage referred

to as The Den. This charming cabin is suitable for a single traveler or couple and has a queen bed, en suite bathroom and front porch overlooking their plunge pool. Hickatee has also started offering free Garifuna drumming lessons on Wednesday evenings with local drumming star Ray McDonald.



*Hickatee Den: New room suitable for singles or couples overlooking plunge pool*

Please contact individual properties for more information and reservations. See BTIA members list on Page 6 for email and telephone numbers.

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# 2010 PG Christmas Bird Count Lee Jones

The Punta Gorda Christmas Bird Count, held this year on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, was a huge success! Despite off-and-on rain throughout the day, we got 259 species, our second highest ever. Compare that with last year when we got 234 species, our lowest count ever. What a difference a year makes!

It was nice to see several new faces this year, both from Punta Gorda and from farther afield. Local residents, Robert Pennell, Kayla Mahler, Elmar Requena, and Jill Cotter from P.G. participated for the first time this year, as did Maarten Hofman from Ya'axché Conservation Trust. From up north, Roni Martinez, Blancaneaux Lodge's primo bird guide, was able to join us this year, as was Eliezer "Steve" Sho from Armenia. Steve's father, Juan Sho, formerly of San Antonio Village, has participated nearly every year since the count's inception in 2000. In all, we had 26 participants, mostly from Toledo District, but a few from as far away as Cayo.

Highlights this year included a striking Emerald Toucanet, one of a small group that have been coming to fruiting trees at Machaca Hill Rainforest Canopy Lodge since early December. Victor Bonilla's group gets the prize for the most



*Emerald Toucanet at Machaca Hill*

missed Belted Kingfisher, a species that should be common, but thanks to Rob Hirons, we managed to get one. Sora, normally a common marsh bird in winter, was down from a ten-year average of 20 to just 4 this year. And we only got 4 Snowy Egrets, down from 303 last year and a ten-year average of 75. Other herons and egrets were also way down this year. Aguacaliente Lagoon, where most of our waders hang out, was too flooded to get into last year, and so dry this year that there

was hardly any water in the lagoon. One of the more useful aspects of the Christmas Bird Count is the long-term trends in bird populations that they can detect. The P.G. count, however, has only been around for

11 years, not enough to see significant changes in most cases. However, for a few species we

have already been able to see some modest changes. The Tropical Mockingbird, which lives in the pine savannas and pasturelands from north of Medina Bank all the way to Orange Walk, has always been a rare sight in Punta Gorda. For the first seven years of the count we fluctuated between zero and two mockingbirds each year. Two years ago we got 3, and this year we got 8. Expect to start seeing more of these su-

perative singers around P.G. in coming years. Perhaps within the next decade they will be a common sight around town.

Another bird that is starting to turn up regularly in the area in winter is White-winged Dove. Fifty years ago it was unrecorded in Belize. Then, in the mid-1960s a few began turning up around Corozal. Now they are abundant in Corozal District year round and steadily moving southward. Two years ago we had an exceptional 36 on the count and this year we had 5. The first few years of the count we were lucky to get even one.



*Sora ins standing water on San Antonio road beyond Dump*

So far, there is no indication from these annual counts that any species are in decline, but as P.G. continues to grow and more and more forest is lost locally, expect to see some of the forest species getting scarcer. Bird populations, like most everything else in our lives, are in a constant state of flux.



*Tropical Mocking bird at Cattle Landing*

number of unusual species: 3 Fork-tailed Flycatchers, 2 Eye-ringed Flatbills (what a great name!), a Palm Warbler, and the first ever Yucatan Vireo for Punta Gorda – all around Orange Point and the old VOA facility. Good job guys (and girl)!

The dry weather we have been having this fall did not hurt our bottom line, that is, the total number of species recorded, but it did reduce the totals for many of our wetland species. For example, we nearly

## Birding Web Site

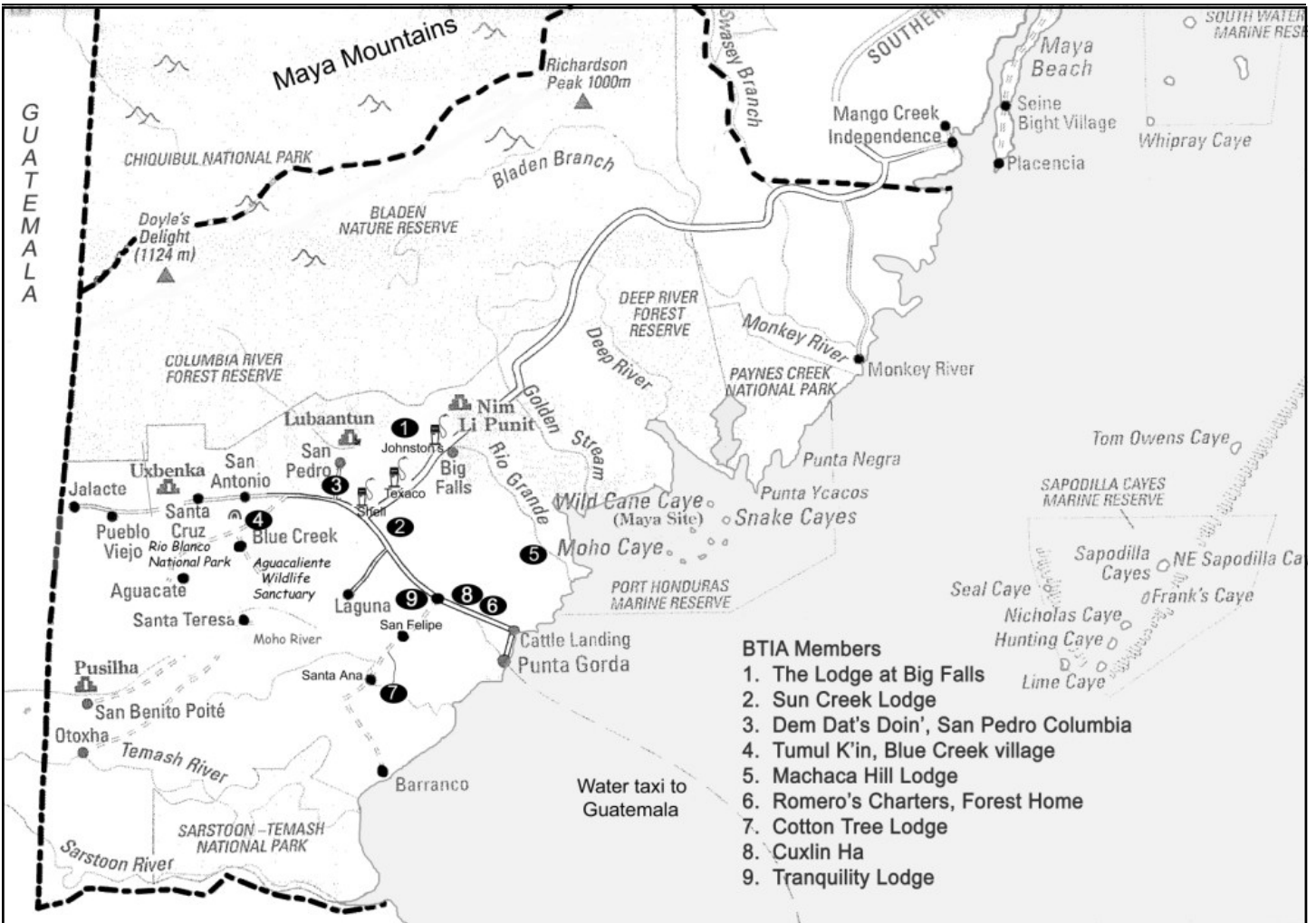
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sharing bird songs from around the world

If you want to improve your bird call identification skills this really impressive site contains downloadable mp3 files of bird songs and calls. It calls itself the "the community database of share bird sounds from around the world". Search for a bird and all recordings will be brought up with details of the recordist, date, country, location, elevation and type (whether it is a song or call etc) as well as details of other species audible on the same recording.

# TOLEDO DISTRICT



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**PG Hospital:** 722-2026 / 722-2161 / 722-2145  
**PG Fire Department:** 722-2032  
**National Emergencies (NEMO):** 822-0153  
**Belize Tourism Board:** 227-2420 / 227-2417  
**BTIA Main Office Belize City:** 227-1144



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## Visitor's Voice

**Neil Williams lives in London, UK and was visiting Belize for three weeks during January and February this year. He stayed at Sirmoor Hill Farm just west of Punta Gorda next to the BDF's Fairweather Camp.**

**How did you plan your visit?**

I did research online including looking at the Belize Tourism Board web site and then buying the Lonely Planet guide to "Central America on a Shoestring" and the Rough Guide to Belize which is my preferred guide. It seems to be set out better and include better explanations and write ups and I like the ethos behind the Rough Guide.

**What have you liked best about Toledo?**

I have never been in a jungle area before and have enjoyed its diversity and the ruggedness. The people have been very friendly and welcoming.

**Have there been any negatives?**

Well for the traveler on a budget then the prices in Belize are high by comparison with neighbouring countries.

**Has anything surprised you?**

I was really pleasantly surprised to arrive in Punta Gorda on PG Day and the celebrations for Paul Nabor's birthday. I had a great time at the festival and met lots of people but had no idea about it beforehand since there was nothing in the guide books or online.

**What advice would you give visitors to Toledo?**

I would tell them to make sure that they give enough time to explore the area and get a feel for it. It really is a little gem and it's nice because there are not so many visitors here.

