

# Honey from the Maya forest

A sustainable economic alternative for local communities

## The Selva Maya

The Selva Maya is a tropical forest region extending over Belize, northern Guatemala and south-eastern Mexico. It covers an area of more than four million hectares of protected areas and is the most extensive tropical rainforest of Mesoamerica. The Selva Maya hosts an extraordinary biological diversity in over 20 different ecosystems, which are of great importance to all three countries as a safeguard for ecosystem services (water, biodiversity, natural resources).

However, the Selva Maya is exposed to extreme pressures that strongly compromise its short and long-term viability and operability. The main reasons are forest fires, illegal logging and exploitation of flora and fauna as well as unsustainable large- and small-scale farming. In order to protect and conserve the Selva Maya it needs alternative income sources from the forest such as timber and non-timber forest products, one of them being honey.

## Beekeeping in the Selva Maya

Due to the tropical conditions (climate, weather, soil) and the biodiversity of the vegetation of the Selva Maya, as well as the great diversity of bees (*Apis mellifera* and endemic species of mellipona bees), the Selva Maya is a suitable place to produce high-quality honey.

These characteristics allow for a unique flavoured honey with high quality consistency. Those attributes are well recognized at the national and international market. Germany is one of the main importers of honey from the Selva Maya.



*Protected areas of high extension located in the heart of the Selva Maya region*

There are a number of producer groups that are organically certified. And given that many more beekeepers are interested in certification, organic beekeeping is a powerful incentive for the conservation of the Selva Maya.

## Meliponiculture

Meliponiculture is the work with native, stingless bees. There are 17 melipona species in the Selva Maya, where this type of apiculture is being practiced since pre-columbian times by the local population.



*L. to r.:  
The Mayan Site Calakmul in the Selva Maya, Mexico  
& a beehive*

Melipona bees are kept in log hives and honey is extracted with a syringe. The yearly harvest from meliponiculture is between 200 and 5000 grams- which is four times less, than what is harvested from honey-beekeeping (*Apis* species).

Melipona honey is traditionally used for medicinal purposes (e.g. wound healing, eye cataracts and respiratory diseases) and nowadays also an ingredient for beauty products while its exceptional taste invites for it to be used like honeybee honey.

### Value-added Honey products

In the Selva Maya, honey is not the only product from bees. Beekeepers and beekeeping groups, many of which are all-female, also produce propolis, soap, candles, and other derivatives.

Beekeeping in the region is a sustainable alternative for increasing income and livelihood of local families while being an important conservation mechanism in the Selva Maya.



*A honeybeekeeper in the Selva Maya*



*A selection of value added local honey products*

The Selva Maya Programme, which is implemented on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) is supporting local actors to protect and enhance the sustainable use of the Selva Maya, among others through strengthening the Honey Value Chain.

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