Iracambi
Saving Forests, Changing Lives

International Women’s Day
Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity
Iracambi’s Story

- Iracambi is a Brazilian and US registered non-profit based on a rainforest reserve in one of the world’s most important biodiversity hotspots: Brazil’s Atlantic Forest
- Bought in 1989 as the dream of the Le Bretons, ex-World Bank economist Robin and concert pianist Binka, it is a renowned model of on-farm forest conservation
- Since 1999, the Iracambi Conservation and Research Center has hosted 3,000+ students, researchers and volunteers from 40+ countries
- Iracambi pioneers environmental education in the region, educating all ages of the local community on the importance of environmentalism and sustainability
- Today, Iracambi encompasses the land, the rainforest reserve, the non-profit, a 25 year track record and body of research data, a solid reputation, a skilled enthusiastic team, and an international network of passionate “Iracambistas.”
- United by a common passion for the environment, Iracambistas are encouraged to use and develop their skills in a way that is mutually beneficial for themselves and for the preservation of the Atlantic Rainforest
The Women of Iracambi

- Iracambi educates, motivates and inspires people from the local community and around the world - women are an integral part of this
- Gender has never determined how best people can support Iracambi’s goals - we focus on the strengths individuals bring as people, not as a man or a woman
- Locally, Iracambi has pioneered industry for women and got them more involved, encouraging them to take up employment and even spearhead businesses
- Iracambi has also been active in the fight for equal pay, and that women and men now earn the same is a real victory for the community
- This International Women’s Day, Iracambi would like to thank and celebrate the wonderful Iracambistas who happen to be women – here are some of their stories...
Carminha was born and raised in Graminha, the community surrounding Iracambi, and after being employed as a cook was encouraged to take on running the restaurant as her own business.

15 years ago equal pay for women, let alone running a business, was unheard of but Iracambi helped secure equality in the local community and promote women’s rights.

Despite initial insecurity, Carminha took a leap of faith into the unknown with Iracambi’s support, and now runs a successful local business that has changed her and her family’s life for the better.

“For an employee to become a business woman... I was a little bit insecure, but then everything worked out and we changed for the better, certainly a lot better.”

Carminha Santos, Local Business Woman & Restaurant Owner, Brazil
Shalanda, a biology senior at Hampton University, attended Iracambi’s 100k Strong in the Americas student exchange program.

During her time at Iracambi, she and her fellow American students were encouraged to build working relationships and lasting friendships with Brazilian students, while learning about environmental conservation and its realities.

The emphasis on individuals doing their part, no matter how small, has made a lasting impression on Shalanda, who has taken away a strong desire to continue being a responsible inhabitant of the earth.

“To me Iracambi means hope and possibilities, using actions and education to help the Mata Atlântica prosper. It gives scientists, students, and community members many opportunities to learn and incorporate sustainable practices in their lives.”

Shalanda Grier, Biology Student, North Carolina USA
Georgia came to Iracambi as a second year Biology and Studio Art student, on course to head into the medical field after college. Spending the majority of her time outdoors, she saw first hand the immense and insurmountable challenges in balancing scientific research, community development, and conservation. Georgia’s experiences and opportunities at Iracambi comprised an essential stepping stone to where she is today, changing her directional course from medicine to graduate biology studies on the effects of climate change on wildlife.

“At Iracambi I felt empowered and inspired to join the research community, which has recently seen a massive surge in the female representation and scientific effort”

Georgia Titcomb, Biologist, California USA
Verity came to Iracambi as a 20 year old film student and, despite lack of experience, was challenged to make her own film.

Motivated to gain good footage, she camped out alone in the forest where she was startled by strange noises outside her forest, which turned out to be a mountain lion.

Undeterred, Verity finished her film and has since built a successful career in wildlife filmmaking and became a noted BBC producer, spreading the example of Iracambi internationally.

“To have a moment when you realize how you want to spend the rest of your life is pretty special, my moment came at Iracambi.”
Verity White, Wildlife Film Producer, UK
Shelby, a recent economics & policy graduate, was travelling around South America volunteering ahead of embarking on career in environmental policy.

Part of her time was spent at Iracambi, where she enjoyed a true conservation experience, particularly relishing reforesting efforts where she physically imparted new and beneficial life upon the planet.

Inspired by the conservation efforts of the Iracambi team, she is certain of exactly what she wants to be fighting for professionally and personally.

“After feeling the forest moving and living around me, after seeing impossibly delicate and beautiful flows, after hearing about the degradation of ecosystems in the area due to human activity, my resolve to devote my life to environmental policy is more solidified.”

Shelby Sugierski, Graduate, North Carolina USA
Iracambi has given me experience and extra motivation to carry on chasing my dreams.”

Miriam Boucher, Wildlife & Fisheries Management, Canada

After completing a BSc in Environmental Biology, Miriam headed to Iracambi to take on the role of volunteer manager while also running the wildlife monitoring program.

Countless unique experiences were topped by a trip into the mountains, where a lack of tents meant sleeping in hammocks under the stars with fellow volunteer Janet, being terrified yet thrilled to hear every animal passing by.

Iracambi is Miram’s starting point: it was her first real experience in the field working with wildlife and reaffirmed her will to pursue conservation, providing skills she needed to move onto the next step – a environmental masters degree.
Working on a masters in sustainable development, Jess’ plans to spend a year out in Brazil were confirmed after hearing Binka speak at her school.

Her work included establishing a structure to buy food from local growers in a co-operative format, run by women, and facilitating a strategic planning process, as well as conducting her own research on local mining.

Jess was able to forge positive connections between Iracambi and the community, falling not only in love with Brazil but also a Brazilian, and along the way learning how to live with less and let go of many limiting cultural constraints that she now knows are not important to lead a rich life.

“Iracambi provides education - for women in the community to be more tied to the environment and have role models that break some of the gender stereotypes, and for international volunteers to learn about social and environmental justice which then empowers many to go out and contribute to the world.”

Jessica Harper-Santos, Doctorate in Social Policy, New Hampshire USA
When biochemistry graduate Melanie came to Iracambi, she was still unclear what road she wanted to take in life.

Volunteering at Iracambi, she spent her time researching plants, walking, watching sunrises, swimming, learning, and meeting amazing people, but was also arriving at some important decisions.

One of these decisions was to embark on a PhD, and having gained a neuroscience doctorate from Oxford University, Melanie is now building a successful career in the pharmaceuticals industry, travelling the world for strategic medical communications.

“Iracambi is a place to think, a place to learn, a place where good people go.”

Melanie Sobczyk, Doctorate in Neuroscience & Consultant, UK
After being one of Iracambi’s first volunteers, visiting while it was still a farm, Nella returned to set up the medicinal plants project in 1999.

Researching the ecology and ethnobotany of herbs, she worked with the forest elders, revitalizing traditional plant medicines and celebrating the value of the forest at a time when the land it grew on was often deemed more valuable than the plants.

Returning to the UK, Nella made it her mission to raise awareness about sustainable herbal sourcing - she worked alongside WWF on the international medicinal plant conservation scene, revisiting Iracambi several times to trial a new herbal harvesting standard. Today, “Fair Wild” is a widely recognized certification for the sustainable wild collection of medicinal plants – saving plants that save lives.

“Iracambi offers a window between the modern world with its scientific research and the traditional world where forest farming communities live in rhythm with nature. How fortunate we are to have such a window, we all have so much to learn from the forest …”

Eleanor Gallia, Medical Herbalist, UK
Steffi had been working as a psychiatric hospital therapist for over 20 years when she took a sabbatical year in Brazil, an incredible journey given growing up in East Germany meant travel abroad was forbidden.

Having always felt close to nature and desiring to contribute to environmental conservation, Steffi delighted in the opportunity to plant trees, wake up to the sound of hummingbirds and take in the amazing mountain views.

Despite retuning to her job, Steffi’s time at Iracambi changed her life and she treasures the memories on a daily basis, even being able to share the transformative experience through her mentorship of German gap year student and Iracambista Anna.

“Living in Iracambi's stress-free environment surrounded by purely natural sounds was reinvigorating and the memory of the experience still helps me get me through stressful periods many years later.”

Stefanie Seeger, Psychiatric Therapist, Germany
Eloise, a financial management consultant, took a break from reality to hop over the Atlantic Ocean and work for Iracambi.

Taking skills from her old life to support strategy and financial planning, while attempting to keep the volunteers in check, she has revived a passion for environmentalism and found a new lease as she applies herself to such a worthy cause.

In such a incredible place surrounded by stimulating and driven people, Eloise has learnt to remember what is really important in life, and will strive to live by the lessons of Iracambi wherever her road takes her.

“The next step, while still uncertain, is immeasurably more exciting and full of promise thanks to my time at Iracambi”.
Eloise Sobczyk, Management Consultant, UK

REMINDING WOMEN WHAT’S IMPORTANT
Binka Le Breton, co-founder of Iracambi, started life out as a concert pianist before moving to Africa where she met and married husband Robin.

To pursue a dream of on-farm forest conservation, they upped and left their life in the USA to relocate to Brazil and establish Iracambi, where Binka reinvented herself as a writer and speaker, documenting their story in her book “Where the Road Ends”.

Now a renowned environmental and human rights activist, Binka’s fearless personality inspires others to join Iracambi in its fight for environmentalism and sustainability, while she works tirelessly to ensure the incredible network both at home and internationally is enduring.

“Binka Le Breton is a force of nature and so promotes female empowerment in itself.”

“Binka has encouraged me to do my part no matter how small.”

Testimonials from Iracambistas
Iracambi educates, encourages and inspires people in the local community and from around the world, developing the personal skills and their passion for environmentalism and sustainability. Women are a fundamental part of this.

With your support there is the opportunity to achieve so much more in working with women and men in order to preserve the Atlantic Rainforest.

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