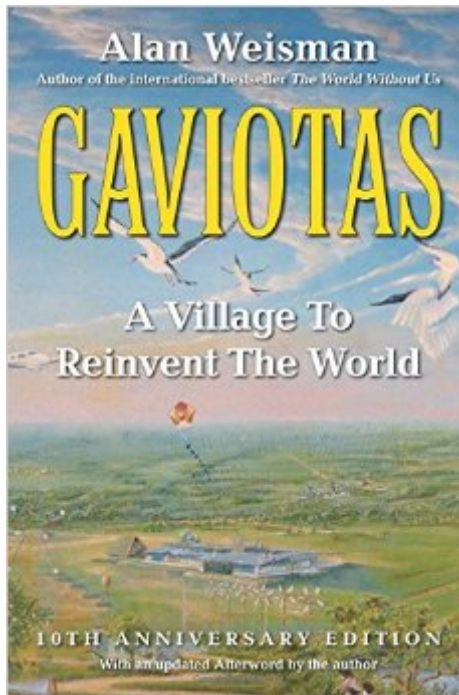


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# Gaviotas: A Village To Reinvent The World, 2nd Edition



## Synopsis

Los Llanos—the rain-leached, eastern savannas of war-ravaged Colombia—are among the most brutal environments on Earth and an unlikely setting for one of the most hopeful environmental stories ever told. Here, in the late 1960s, a young Colombian development worker named Paolo Lugari wondered if the nearly uninhabited, infertile llanos could be made livable for his country's growing population. He had no idea that nearly four decades later, his experiment would be one of the world's most celebrated examples of sustainable living: a permanent village called Gaviotas. In the absence of infrastructure, the first Gaviotans invented wind turbines to convert mild breezes into energy, hand pumps capable of tapping deep sources of water, and solar collectors efficient enough to heat and even sterilize drinking water under perennially cloudy llano skies. Over time, the Gaviotans' experimentation has even restored an ecosystem: in the shelter of two million Caribbean pines planted as a source of renewable commercial resin, a primordial rain forest that once covered the llanos is unexpectedly reestablishing itself. Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez has called Paolo Lugari the "Inventor of the World." Lugari himself has said that Gaviotas is not a utopia: "Utopia literally means 'no place.' We call Gaviotas a topia, because it's real." Relive their story with this special 10th-anniversary edition of *Gaviotas*, complete with a new afterword by the author describing how Gaviotas has survived and progressed over the past decade.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alan Weisman, a journalist hired by NPR to investigate solutions for environmental crises, spent years collecting information in a tiny, remote village at the eastern edge of the war-torn country of Colombia. That village was Gaviotas; this book is his result. I read this book on a recommendation from Daniel Quinn, author of "The Story of B" and "Beyond Civilization." Quinn's entire philosophy rests on two ideas: living in a sustainable manner, and allowing the reader to come up with their own solutions for doing so. Gaviotas is a community where people did just that - through ingenuity, creativity, and hard work, the residents of this planned village created a place where water is pulled from the ground using pumps attached to children's see-saws, heat is provided by the sun, and electricity by the wind. It's a progressive's dream come true, and an experiment that has succeeded in all possible ways. This book lays out the history of Gaviotas and its unique founder, Paolo Lugari, and places it within the context of the ongoing struggles in Colombia. In the wake of the World Trade Center attack, I decided to re-read Gaviotas to remind myself that not only is there hope for humanity as a whole, but hope that individuals will begin to take responsibility to begin freeing ourselves from the confining forces of our self-imposed prisons called "civilization," but still manage to retain the good things, too. Every person on earth should read and re-read this book. If you haven't, buy it now or start hoofing it to the library.

A captivatingly inspirational account of a story that reaches to the core of what is remarkable about human nature, human courage, and human ingenuity achieving something great and important in the face of daunting conditions. The continuing adaptive accomplishments of the Gaviotas people in the face of multiple challenges -- extreme environmental conditions, corrupt government practices, turbulent and deadly national politics, indifferent and unsupportive post-1980s corporate globalization, continuing uncertainty -- is truly an affirmation that people can, and hopefully will, achieve a kind of society that is both ecologically sustainable and humanly necessary. This book is 'the power of one' writ large on our collective future. I teach a university course entitled: Humanistic Values in a Technological Society and, in the face of social and environmental problems caused by industrialization and electronic media-technology, it is difficult for the title not to seem a proverbial oxymoron. In the future this book will be required reading so that students can see that indeed there are solutions to our collective problems, both human and technological. One reviewer bemoaned that there was no 'useful information' in the book, meaning it was short on technical details (I am sure this will follow if sufficient positive interest is shown to this publication). In response I would point out that the people of Gaviotas have shown that the most important and necessary 'commodity' of the future is and will be human inspiration and perseverance; given these, the details

will follow. I thank Alan Weisman for telling the Gaviotas story.

In 1966, when he was 22, Paolo Lugari and his brother drove over barely passable roads to a desolate area 200 miles east of Bogota, Columbia. The llanos area is a poor-soil barren that grows only a few nutrient-deficient grasses, a vast expanse of sun-baked plains in spite of over 100 inches of rain per year. A place of deadly water and hungry mosquitos. Conditions were so daunting that the Columbian government abandoned an attempt to build a road through the area. Lugari saw an opportunity to create something very special. And he did it. Today Gaviotas is a thriving, sustainable community of hundreds of joyous people studying, inventing, producing, singing and dancing amidst a huge forest that they planted. Residents from all walks of life have designed and built, planted and harvested, birthed, nurtured, taught, and entertained. There are teeter-totters that operate super-efficient pumps to bring water to the school, solar heat to cook meals, solar kettles to sterilize drinking water, ultra-light windmills to provide power. The hospital has been designated one of the 40 most important buildings in the world. Some have called Gaviotas a utopia. Lugari insists that, "Utopia literally means no place. We call Gaviotas a topia because it's real." Gaviotas the village is surprising, uplifting, extraordinary. Gaviotas the nonfiction book is as compelling as a novel, as educational as a textbook, as inspirational as the biography of a great person. If you need to rise early, do not take this book to bed with you.

In 1998, journalist Alan Weisman collected and presented information about a little known, yet quite monumental, village known as Gaviotas. To get there, one must travel 16 hours by car from the nearest major Columbian city, Bogotá. Even then the path there is not a smooth one; rough, muddy roads and severe political unrest serve as some major barriers in getting to Gaviotas. So why then is such an arduous trip worth it; in essence, Gaviotas is yet another tiny village located in a generally uninhabitable region and possesses none of the modern modes of transportation or communication that we are accustomed to. While in a sense these aspects may be true of Gaviotas, it is also undeniable that this community holds as one of the most efficient, supportive, and thoughtful communities on the planet. Started in 1971 by a group of Bogotá scientists, Gaviotas originally was created as a sort of scientific experiment, a reaction to the way things were - which clearly wasn't working. A Gaviotas saying goes "the real maturity in life is to realize your dreams" and the founders of Gaviotas did just that when they decided to create their own society. The harsh life and extreme poverty that had been rampant in developing urban areas paired with the blatant depletion of natural resources was enough to spark the idea that maybe there should be a change.

Yet instead of trying to make changes in the system already in place, this group of determined individuals took on the radical notion of creating an entirely new, segregated, yet completely self-sufficient, place to live. And that is just what happened.

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