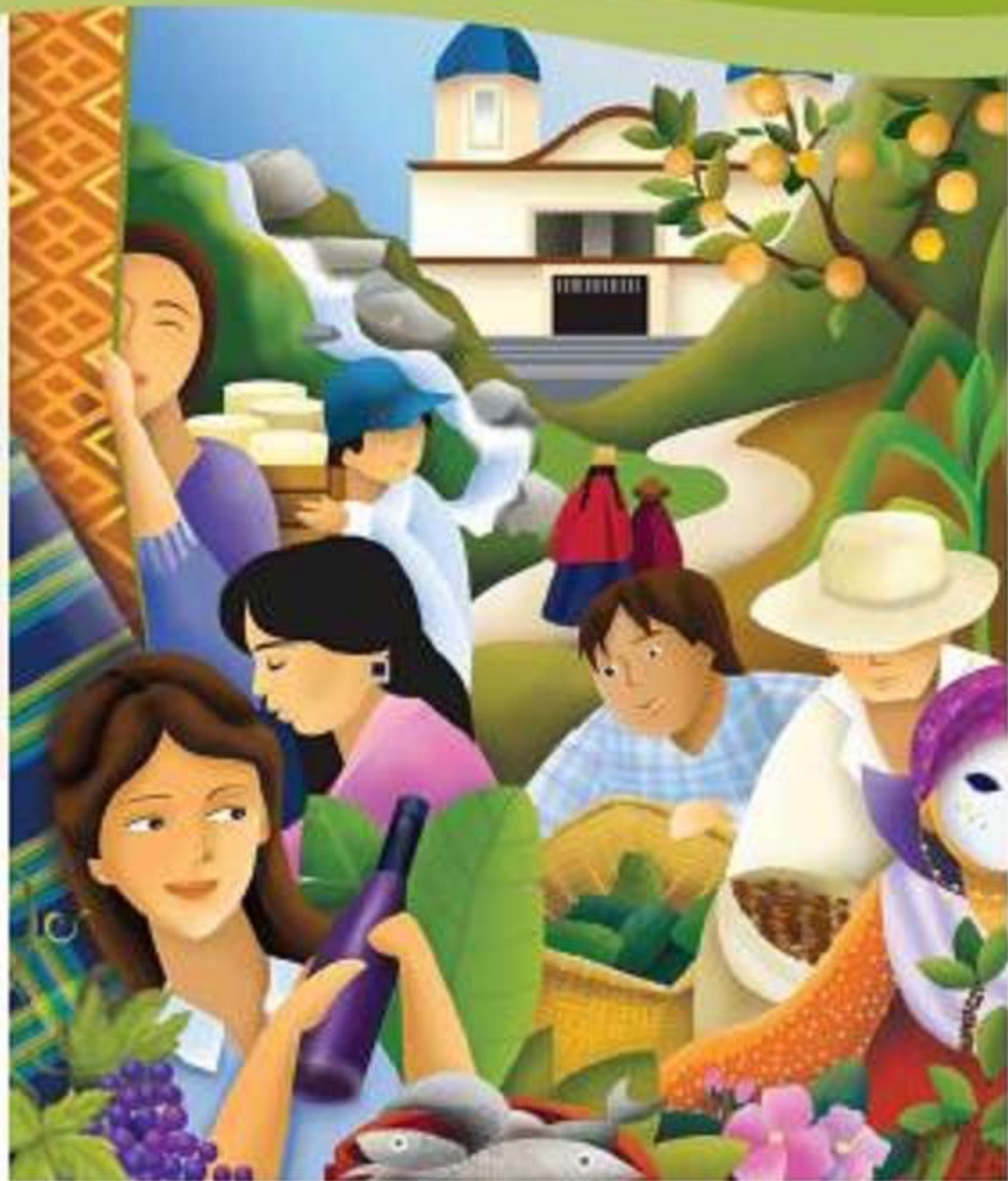




A LOOK TO SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES OF AGROTURISM IN LATIN AMERICA





A LOOK SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES OF AGROTOURISM IN LATIN AMERICA

DIRECTION OF TECHNICAL LEADERSHIP
AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

HEMISPHERIC PROGRAM OF RURAL
AGROINDUSTRY AND HEMISPHERIC
PROGRAM OF AGROTOURISM

DIRECTION OF REGIONAL OPERATIONS
AND INTEGRATION

DIVISION OF HORIZONTAL TECHNICAL
COOPERATION

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presentation

The Rural Agroindustry Hemispheric Program – PRODAR- has promoted the development and application of mechanisms that make possible the direct exchange of lessons, experiences and testimonies among actors directly involved with rural agroindustry and agrotourism in the Americas. As a part of this vision, it has implemented a contest for the documentation of experiences that has been conducted for four editions.

Such mechanisms are part of the IICA's institutional strategy on knowledge management and horizontal cooperation, through which the Institute gathers, analyses and systematizes the advancements achieved in different territories of the region with respect to development processes, to later negotiate their transference to actors that need them through adapted methodologies and certify their adequate reception, with benefits for all parties. Thus, the Institute facilitates the solution of problems related with rural development that can be similar in different regions.

The above has allowed, since the fourth edition of the contest for the systematization of experiences on rural agroindustry, the inclusion to the initiative of the Horizontal Technical Cooperation Division of IICA and the Hemispheric Program of Agrotourism. The first Division works along the line of boosting the Offices and the Thematic Areas to aggregate value to the way cooperation is delivered. The second Program mentioned has a similar interest in identifying and disseminating good practices on this subject. In the first three versions of the competition, the financial support came from the program Information Net about Postharvest (INPHO, from FAO).

Thanks to these contests we now have updated information on successful rural agribusinesses, specifically on rural agroindustry and agrotourism, which it is hoped will be useful as

a reference for the horizontal technical cooperation that can be directly achieved among countries, with IICA's support.

This document describes some of the agrotourism experiences of the winners of such contests. These experiences have been divided into three sections: i) Routes and theme tours locally managed; ii) Gastronomy, agricultural production and outdoor activities, motors of local tourism; and iii) Programs and support projects for agrotouristic development.

Through these files, the reader can travel along the road lived by each one of these entrepreneurs, from the emerging idea, going through the different stages of its development until its present situation, the accomplishments achieved, the challenges faced and the lessons learned.

The files are presented in a summarized way so they can be understood without any important difficulty. All of those who wish to study in depth one of the described experiences may do so through the contacts appointed in each case.

We hope this document will be useful and satisfactory for the reader, and that it will allow to stimulate the generation of more agrotouristic entrepreneurs, as a rural family strategy for income diversification or as a way to value cultures and ancient knowledge, or in order to take advantage of the demands emerged from urban inhabitants who miss the local, the traditional and the recreation possibilities associated with natural resources.

THE EDITORS

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ROUTES AND THEME TOURS LOCALLY MANAGED



The black pepper tour: a new addition to agrotourism in Costa Rica

Black Pepper Tour¹



COSTA RICA **Project Location**

The project is located on Chilamate Ranch, in Sarapiquí canton, in Costa Rica.

History and the dawn of an idea

Pepper was introduced to Sarapiquí in 1970; it was an innovative crop and was a good option for agricultural producers from the region.

Productive results were favorable and employment was generated for many families.

As the years went by, the people of Chilamate Ranch realized that although many people the world over used black pepper everyday, few were familiar with the plant and the process required to differentiate between black, white or green pepper.

Neither was there knowledge about the environmental benefits of growing the plant: it uses porous trees as support (*Erythrina* sp) which shade 85% of a hectare and contribute neutral carbon, atmospheric nitrogen, water, biodiversity and organic material as a result of the plant's fallen leaves.

In fact, National Fund for Forest Financing (Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal (FONAFIFO)) would take this crop as payment for environmental services (PSA).

The producers decided to design a tourism product which would offer technical information on the growth and processing of pepper, with advice and assistance from Fredy Gamboa, graduate of Universidad EARTH.



A tour that mixes history with gastronomy

The purpose of this endeavour, which seeks the innovative development of pepper-based foods and themed tours, is to be a part of the agrotourism package of Sarapiquí, based on a crop that is consumed worldwide and thereby improve the socioeconomic level of participating families.

The Project offers the visitor the opportunity to learn more about black pepper, sharing some of the technical and historical highlights of the crop – the introduction of pepper to Latin America, countries with the highest level of production, etc. There is also a video about the processing

¹ October de 2008.

of pepper, which was created in cooperation with PROPICA.

The tour includes a full service restaurant which offers nine courses, served Black Pepper Tour style, including: pepper steak, chicken and pork, with jalapeños or in a mushroom salsa, served with salads.

Dessert, also pepper-based, consists of ice cream decorated with strawberries, apples or grapes and pepper syrup.

Complement the tour with a visit to a local store, with local craft products for sale and on display, not to mention the famous pepper sauce, ready to buy in four ounce bottles.



Project structure

The project covers 600 square metres of concrete parking area. The tour travels over a 451.86 metre trail, with six check points which highlight the eight themes that make up the tour. The route is made of stone, reinforced with bamboo used to hold them firm.

Along the trail, there is a wooded rest area with a bird feeder. The restaurant resembles a ranch, with wooden tables and seating.

External support

The initiative gained media attention, with the El Financiero newspaper and Channel 7 reporting on the project's activities.

In addition, the Project received welcome support from the Sarapiquí Tourism Office (Cámara de Turismo de Sarapiquí (CATUSA)) and tourism agencies, such as Swiss Travel.

There are ongoing efforts to register the pepper syrup with the Property Registry of Costa Rica.



Main lesson learned.

Agrotourism and rural tourism activities are competitive and provide a significant economic contribution to farmers.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Address: 600 metros al sureste de la escuela de Rancho Chilamate, Sarapiquí, Heredia, Costa Rica, C.A.
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2



Wine producers in Patagonia, Argentina break into the tourism sector

Diego Rodil²



ARGENTINA

This experience takes place in the Río Negro province, a region in El Alto Valle, in the north of Patagonia, Argentina.

Viñedos y Bodega Agrestis (Argestis Vineyard & Winery): an exemplary enterprise

Viñedos y Bodega Agrestis is a 15 year old family business that came into being when Norberto Ghiradelli, having graduated as an agronomist, began a vineyard project with friends. In the beginning it was just a hobby, but in 1992 the family acquired a farmhouse and shortly thereafter, plants, in France. In 1994, seven hectares of vineyard were planted and the old winery was reconditioned to accommodate the making of fine wines. Today, the company features 20 hectares of vineyard and 25 000 bottles produced annually, with offerings including Nature and Nature rose in sparkling wine and Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay in still wine. Seventy percent is marketed in the region whilst thirty percent is marketed to the rest of the country and abroad. The quality of their products has allowed them to compete with large wineries and has made them one of the first in the region to incorporate rural tourism, which has led to steady growth.

“Tourism is very similar to the world of wine, which is concerned with creating and selling pleasure.” This is how Norberto describes the cohesion achieved between the primary (grape production), secondary (wine production) and tertiary (rural tourism) sectors, thereby creating maximum benefits.



The innovation of rural tourism: creation and development

“Tourist activity is born, almost spontaneously, from the time one begins to expand, because even if it's not organized, they're always visitors,” says Norberto.

In 1998, after a family trip to France, the idea was born to open the winery to visitors. Despite the fact that development of similar activities in the region were few, the plan was strengthened by the creation of a local tourism area and a visit from an agro route specialist from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food.

As the business grew, small investments were made: a bathroom was built for visitors, the thatched barbecue area was remodeled, dinner sets, table cloths and sampling/drinking cups were bought, along with furniture. At present, they are expanding the barbecue area and kitchen, as well as building two rooms for accommodation.

The latest investment has been a small wine store where accessories such as corkscrews, decanters, cups, enotherapy (wine) products, aprons with the winery's logo and books are on offer. There are also hopes of incorporating delicatessen products from the region.

In addition to the visits and tastings, there will soon be other options such as sampling of the traditional fare of the Argentine countryside (e.g. “empanadas” and barbecue).

2. Experimental Agricultural Station, Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA) Alto Valle. IV Concurso de Sistematización de Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe (IV Compilation of Systematisation of Successful Experiences in Agribusiness in Latin America and the Caribbean). PRODAR-IICA. December 2008.



AN EFFICIENT FAMILY BUSINESS

The roles of each family member are fundamental to the success of the business. Norberto's wife, María Rosa, takes care of the business side and the gastronomy tours. Florencia, the eldest daughter, with a background in tourism and the hotel industry, develops new tourism offerings. Alfredo, the agronomist, started a postgraduate degree in Wine Marketing and has established a Pinot Noir business in the U.S. Lucila, the architect, has contributed to the project's infrastructure; and the youngest daughter, Julia, handles various activities, e.g. labeling. Decision making is democratic and the family agreed that tourism investments are the most essential.

A network has been established at town, provincial and national levels, with Ghiradelli currently serving as president of the Civil Wine Route Association of Rio Negro (Asociación Civil Ruta del Vino de Río Negro).

Although the activity developed organically in the beginning, the hospitable nature of the family and the time invested resulted in a positive public response, which encouraged further innovation: three tasting classes at the winery and implementation of similar proposals along with cooks from the "slow food" movement and a 'regional diary'. They also cater to the corporate sector for dinners, birthdays or product presentations, which presents year-round business.

Efforts that bore fruit in the market

The evolution of their product has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of visitors and volume of sales - "People don't just visit, they also buy". According to a study carried out by INTA, since 2005 Agrestis has grown much more (107%) than other wineries; although it must be said that wine tourism is quite favorable in Argentina.

NUMBER OF TOURISTS THAT VISITED VIÑEDOS Y BODEGA AGRESTIS

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008
Wine tourists	151	392	418	905

“Rural tourism is especially appealing when the attention paid to visitors makes them actors instead of mere observers. This creates an advantage over the larger wineries that have also added tourism to their product.”



The market segments of note are regional businesses, event planners, residents and transit tourists. The latter find out about local offerings via the town's information office, brochures in local hotels and a smaller percentage, through the web page.

Although the future will not be easy, Ghiradelli sees tourism as a key alternative: "Beyond the glamorous world image of wine are the same problems that face any industry, along with fierce global competition; but differentiating our products with tourism can help us find a solution".

SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Blanco, Graciela, 1999. "La historia de un origen pionero, un pasado de gloria y un presente difícil". En: Fruticultura moderna / GTZ; INTA. Gral. Roca, Río Negro: EEA Alto Valle. P. 20. / Bodegas de Argentina AC (2007): II Informe de turismo vitivinícola de Argentina. Mendoza. P. I. / Yappert Susana, 2008: "Bodegas Agrestis, con identidad rionegrina". En: Diario Río Negro: Rural.

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NOTES:

Web page of the entrepreneurship: <http://www.bodegaagrestis.com.ar> / Web page of INTA Alto Valle: <http://www.inta.gov.ar/altovalle/>

3



Coffee tour in Jayaque, El Salvador

Nadia Chalabi³



EL SALVADOR

This tale takes us to Jayaque, a town in Cordillera del Bálsamo, 38 Km from the capital of El Salvador.

The project's pioneers

The date is October 2008 and the decorations at the Santa Elena farm signal a celebration. The atmosphere is festive and it radiates throughout the coffee plantations, along with the sound of the marimba. Dozens of tour operators, from the U.S., Mexico and other nations, are present to be part of the first farm trip organized in the picturesque town of Jayaque. However, just a year ago, hardly a Salvadoran knew of this place: Jayaque was known only by those who lived there.

It was in this town that local development expert, Ernesto Barraza, acquired the La Esperanza farm in 1995; it was also in this town that Jorge Váldez opened the town's first restaurant: la Casona de Jayaque. It was behind the walls of the latter that Ernesto spoke with local authorities about his desire to turn the town into a tourist destination, an idea which was met by non response.

Years went by and the concept of tourism began to gain relevance for El Salvador. Ernesto considered: why not try to convince the powers that be in Jayaque, one more time?

The awareness phase

As the end of 2004 approached, a small group of individuals and businesses had a meeting. It immediately captured the interest of others: in November 2005, more than 17 persons from the public and private sector met. All of them wrote about their interest in tourism development for Jayaque, convinced of the town's appeal – beautiful landscape, lovely climate, strategic location and rich traditions. Taking advantage of their coffee-growing heritage, the group chose to develop a Coffee Tour, thereby distinguishing itself

from other destinations. Jayaque was also the topic of an article in a local paper and a television report. The weekend after the report was aired, 15 tour buses arrived. At restaurant Casona,

Mr. Váldez had to improvise with a sopa de gallina (chicken soup) that his guests loved. As unprecedented as this was, it happened again on the two weekends which followed.

The Jayaque coffee tour group is born

Mr. Barraza requested a consultation from the Competitive Development Foundation for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Fundación Promotora de la Competitividad de la Micro, Pequeña y Mediana Empresa; CENTROMYPE), co-financed by the Technical Assistance Fund. An agreement was reached in 2007: each member of the Group brought USD 225 to cover 20% of the consultancy fee. The Group (farms and craft enterprises) began weekly meeting and in three meetings had created a work plan, rules for the organization and a business plan which defined three objectives: positioning the Tour with quality products and services,



³ Consultant in agroindustry and tourism (nchalabi@salnet.net). December 2008.

development of human resources and creation of a market strategy.

Jayaque was officially launched in January 2008, an event which saw the Group participating in various interviews for the media.

The leap to fame

“We put tables and seats together in the plaza and on the terrace of the farm”, Ernesto says. “We got the garden ready and we prepared 70 orders of gallina india soup” (chicken soup with potatoes, carrots and herbs). “We hired three persons to help serve. We thought we were ready. We couldn’t have imagined what happened...”

On January 13, 2008, Jayaque was literally flooded with people. More than 250 vehicles tried to find parking around the plaza, on the streets and on the roads that led to the farms. “120 people came to our farm. My children’s friends helped us; I had to put up a sign saying that you could visit but there wasn’t anymore lunch”. The fact that 1000 people had set foot in Jayaque was unprecedented.

“We’ve opened a door that can’t be closed”

The success story repeated itself every week. New articles appeared in the press and television stations prepared special features on the new destination. Mr. Barraza hired more local personnel to cater to the tourists. His daughter, a food science graduate, supervised the kitchen, with the task of food preparation left up to the trained women from the Technological Institute of Central America. Every Sunday, the farm saw between 40 and 60 people and other businesses followed suit.

The oil crisis puts the town to the test

The rise in oil prices in 2008 drastically reduced tourist arrivals. In Jayaque, both spirits and income were low. When Ernesto considered closing the restaurant, four of the young waiters pleaded with him, as the income was of a great help. This encouraged Ernesto to suggest to the rest of the Group to hold on. To help support their efforts, the town published a supplement on Jayaque and master’s students of the Economic and Business Administration Institute provided a market study,

logo, a folded insert (pamphlet), webpage, billboard and a map located in the plaza.

A fresh start has its rewards

Their perseverance payed off and with oil prices normalized once again, Jayaque became the destination of choice for families from the capital once again. The farm trip in October 2008 demonstrated the experience that had been acquired. The farms continued investing in tourism and opened a chilatería (chilate is a drink made with chile, roast corn and cocoa), two cyber-cafes and two pupuserías (tortillas are sold there), creating employment opportunities that were not previously possible.

Lessons Learned

- To achieve success, one or two pioneers are not enough: there is power in numbers. One should also be aware that in general, external support only comes when there is evidence of results.
- The second key element for success is support from private entities. Jayaque rose to fame in one year because of the initiative of a small group of businesses.
- Vision and dedication were priceless. “We had all traveled and we understood the tourism potential”. In the first stage, Ernesto offered the ultimate in dedication and ad honorem. Today, he spends at least three days a week honoring his duties as the Group’s president.
- Promotion of the destination is important, but it is just as essential to get tourists to visit, even if a small number – when visitors have a good time, there is sure to be a domino effect.
- The support and involvement of the local authorities is necessary.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Ernesto Barraza, president of “Jayaque Tour de Café”
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E-mail: ebarrazaibarra@yahoo.com
Web page: <http://www.jayaquetour.com.sv/>

4



The Turrialba cheese agrotourism route

Marvin Blanco M.⁴; Carlos V. Gómez⁵



COSTA RICA

The Region

Santa Cruz de Turrialba is a typical rural community, located on the slopes of the Turrialba volcano in Costa Rica. It is located 1400 metres above sea level and has a population of 3421 (2000 census). The combination of altitude, climate and land type has resulted in a flourishing dairy farm culture, which is believed to sustain 90% of the population (Cascante 2003).

Economic background

Within the district, nearly 275 dairy farms can be found, along with 150 small cheese processing plants, where Turrialba cheese has been made for more than a century, using the same traditional technique. The cheese making process has experienced few technical changes, but significant improvements have been made with the introduction of different livestock breeds (Jersey, Guernsey and Brown Swiss), pastures, as well as the infrastructure of dairy farms and cheese processing plants.

The passing of time has seen remodeling in the community, stainless steel equipment and cold storage have been added and composters and oxidation pools have been built in keeping with sanitary disposal. Today, it is estimated that 70% of the fresh cheese consumed nationally comes from the region which surrounds the Turrialba volcano.

The link between cheese and tourism

As a result of the increase in the cost of inputs, the high level of mediation that occurs in the marketing process and competition from industrial plants, cheese production, for many years, has not produced the employment and income necessary to support a nuclear family, obliging some family members to seek other types of work outside of the community. This has led to the uprooting of and discord within families.

Within this socioeconomic context, cheese producers consider agrotourism to be a viable choice for economic diversification. Along with its tradition in cheesemaking, the district's natural attractions include the Turrialba volcano and the National Guyabo Monument, not to mention the beautiful landscape which lends it a notable tourist potential (Blanco, 2004); and so, in 2003, the "Turrialbe Cheese Route" Project began, which has seen support from the Agricultural Producers Association (Asociación de Productores Agropecuarios (ASOPROA)), as well as NGOs, including Altersial and Hivos, PRODAR-IICA, CATIE and UCR.



⁴ Rural Agroindustry Development Program, Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, July 2008 (email: marvin.blanco@iica.int).

⁵ Association "Productores Agropecuarios de Santa Cruz de Turrialba (ASOPROA)" and co-owner Finca La Florita (email: cvgomez@costarricense.cr).



AN ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE FAMILY

For the producers who have been involved since the beginning, their involvement has signaled a valuable extra source of income. Such is the case with the Gómez Pereira family, who own the La Florita farm. They were one of the first families to consider the diversification of their sources of income via tourism.

Their 3 hectare farm features a cattle ranch (with Jersey and Guernesey) of ten milking cows, along with heifers and calves. In addition to the dairy and local cheese, sustainable practices have also been adopted via composting and organic gardening.

The 5-member family assigns different tasks to everyone to ensure the farm work is done, along with catering to visitors, who learn about the farm via CATIE, hotels in the area and some tour operators.

The Turrialba cheese route

The Route would be a tour of both farms and cheese processors, allowing the tourist to see and learn about the cheese industry and the associated culture. The tour would complement the natural attractions such as the Turrialba volcano and the National Guyabo Monument.

In the first phase of the Route's implementation, the focus was on identification of tourist attractions, the evaluation of dairy farms and processing plants, creating awareness among producers and the organization and training of the group leaders.

Likewise, various steps were taken towards the sourcing of financial resources; there was participation in programs for the coordination and promotion of tourism, as well as in regional fairs. The annual Turrialba Cheese fair has been celebrated since 2002, an event which has contributed to the promotion of the cheese route.

A project with promise

Although there is much work to be done and there are basic elements that still need to be worked on – *improvement of infrastructure and signage, product refinement, coordination of parties involved, relationship creation with tour operators and training*

institutions, promotion and financing of this tourism type – what is important is that the process has begun and more and more visitors are reaching the region. Little by little, producers are seeing the advantages of agrotourism as a complementary source of income for the cheese industry. Without a doubt, this will permit the preservation and dissemination of the cheese heritage in Turrialba.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Blanco, M. 2008. Fortalecimiento de la agricultura familiar a través del agroturismo: el caso de la finca La Florita, Santa Cruz de Turrialba, Costa Rica. Ponencia IV Congreso Internacional de la Red SYAL, Mar del Plata, 27 – October 31, 2008.

5



The weaving route in Argentina

Lorena Roxana López⁶



ARGENTINA

This initiative was developed in the Santiago del Estero and Tucumán provinces, in the regions of Figueroa, San Martín, Santa Lucía, Tafí and Amaicha del Valle, in Argentina.

An endeavour created through the hands -and dedication- of craftsmen

In 2004, five groups of craftsman from Santiago del Estero and Tucumán decided to create an association made up of producers, who were seeking to solve textile production problems and create alternatives to help sustain life in the countryside. They recognized that they could harness their commonalities in art, history and culture.

Listed objectives included teaching, methods of recovering the art of textiles, identification of production criteria and marketing. Affiliate organizations included The Civil Association of Ceibal (Asociación Civil El Ceibal), Taller Gatti (a group of textile entrepreneurs), and the Farming Social Program (Programa Social Agropecuario) of both provinces, as well as agents who, for the past five years, have worked with these groups at the local level.

It soon became apparent that tourism could become an important source of income once tourists were avid craft buyers; and so, the Weaving Route was born, an initiative which addressed the systemization and recovery of textile art traditions (weaving and use of natural dyes).

This is realized via textile, photography, plastics and literature, with the ultimate goal being a strengthening of the links between craftspeople and validating their knowledge, strengths and uniqueness.

The process, step by step

The initiative sought to boost the esteem and identity of the original towns in the area with a textile art museum and a registry of old fashioned book-making techniques.

Work was conducted with at risk groups, including women and youth, who themselves seek to be involved in local development. Their awareness with regard to environmental was raised and they considered the mindset and steps that would prove most beneficial for the sake of development.



⁶ Consultant in communication and free lance journalist. October 2008.

Use of local raw materials was encouraged, e.g. vegetable fibers (cotton and chaguar⁷), animal fibers (from sheep, silkworms and llama) and natural colors from roots, leaves, fruit and bark from native trees, as a means of environmental protection.

Other activities which add value to natural resources were also strengthened, e.g. spinning wool, ceramics, chaguar, wood carving and leather tanning.

Achievements:

- Creation of a textile workshop and a retail centre (for the sale of garments)
- Establishment of an exposition and sales site in Santiago del Estero.
- Training in production techniques, work tools and marketing
- Periodic meeting between groups of craftpersons for decision making, knowledge sharing and preparation.
- Inclusion of persons with varying skill sets at the Grupo La Rueca textile workshops.
- Craftpersons share of textile techniques and artistic expression in rural schools.
- Themed rural art as part of the interior design of hotels and hostels.

Positive results:

- Two exposition/sale sites, one of which is managed by craftpersons.
- Product orders average 600 pesos in sales per month.
- A functioning textile museum which illustrates techniques used by craftpersons.
- 60 women who work as an association.
- More than 100 women involved in cultural and social offerings.
- Five groups of craftpersons from the provinces of Santiago del Estero and Tucumán.



- An exposition of clothing and wool, cotton and leather items at the Hilton Hotel, Buenos Aires, as part of the Vital Voices of America event.
- Links formed with community institutions from every community: schools, rural organizations, parishes, cultural and tourism entities from the provinces, local entrepreneurs, etc.

An important lesson: sharing is essential

It is essential not to ignore the importance of sharing information about achievements, a task which requires time and money. At present, members of the Weaving Route are attempting to source funds to produce a book, "Children of the Route", and material to help share information about textile art, techniques, drawings, craftpersons' lifestories and its relationship with the environment and communities.

In addition, craftpersons are planning conferences which will cater to educational institutions in the Tucumán and Santiago del Estero provinces, providing students of various ages with the opportunity to be a part of their history. "Culture must be preserved, so that those who come know where they come from and where they are going."

⁷ The Quechua term "chaguar" refers to a plant found in the semi-arid Chaco, in Argentina, which resistant fiber is used to elaborate domestic objects such as purses, ponchos, clothes, nets or ropes.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

This file is the product of an interview with Lucrecia Gil Villanueva and María Elena Orellana, from the "Asociación Civil El Ceibal", Santiago del Estero, Argentina.

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Additional information is available at www.elceibal.org.ar and <http://rutatejido.blogspot.com>. Email: elceibal@elceibal.org.ar







**GASTRONOMY, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES, MOTORS OF LOCAL TOURISM**

6



A Costa Rican community enters the business world via agroecotourism

Community Development Program. Universidad EARTH⁸



COSTA RICA

The community of Argentina is located 5 kilometres south of the centre of Pocora, in the canton of Guácimo, in the province of Limón, in Costa Rica.

Tourism as a means to mitigate the crisis

Argentina, Pocora, was a community which focused mainly on coffee growing and, to a lesser extent, agriculture. In 1999, coffee production was seriously affected by its low price on the international market and both income and jobs were lost. In addition, the traditional Costa Rican agricultural sector saw less than favorable changes with regard to its productivity and profitability. This led to local products being replaced by more affordable imports.

While larger businesses opted to grow non-traditional products in order to move beyond the crisis, producers from Argentina considered another option, without abandoning agriculture. It was then that the concept was born to offer tourist visits to local farms, where one could learn about rural life, sustainable agricultural practices and the natural wonder of the community itself.

Product development through association

With hopes of improving the quality of life of those in the community, protecting both the environment and cultural integrity, whilst generating income opportunities, the Argentina Pocora Agroecotourism Association was created in June 2002. One of its main objectives is the sale of agroecotourism services.

The main process implemented by the Association was integrated farms which, by diversifying and integrating agricultural

and livestock production, reduced both their economical and ecological vulnerability.

Thanks to the Community Development Program of Universidad EARTH, members of the organization were trained in various areas of relevance, including farm infrastructure to assure an adequate level of quality and security, business administration, use of composting and preparation of organic fertilizers.

When tourists visit, each member of the family becomes a host and guide, taking visitors to see the natural resources (the majority include a tropical rainforest) and projects in the area.

Visitors also participate in an evaluation of the service, which results have served as an instrument to improve and strengthen the Association.

The present

Today, the Association is the strongest group in the town: it has legal support, discipline, fortnightly meetings of the board of directors and is linked with cantonal organizations, which in turn generate new opportunities.

Furthermore, other groups in the community have been included as strategic partners. As such, the Association of Women Micro-entrepreneurs of Nature and Life & Health offer their medicinal products to tourists; and the Café de la Canasta group provides a pure coffee, free of chemicals – everything is produced within the community.

⁸ IV Concurso de Sistematización de Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe (IV Compilation of Systematisation of Successful Experiences in Agribusiness in Latin America and the Caribbean), PRODAR-IIICA. October 2008.



THE ASSOCIATION AND ITS SERVICES

The Association comprises seven farms which offer the following services:

- Farm Tours: composting, sustainable agricultural practices, models of integrated farms with adequate waste management, medicinal plants, livestock, hatchery, tilapias, etc.
- Caribbean and Costa Rican gastronomy.
- Nature trails to experience local biodiversity (flora and fauna of the rainforest).
- Mountain climbing in primary and secondary woodlands which feature waterfalls and rivers.
- Traditional production processes which revive cultural identity, e.g. mills, carbonera, high quality processed organic coffee, cheese, milk, etc.
- Outdoor sporting activities.
- Typical community activities which revive the rich history of the area.

In addition, steps have been made with other organizations to achieve the level of quality and security required by international standards, with the support of the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, which guarantees a series of tourism incentives and opportunities to promote development and competitiveness.

Achievements

- Training in agro tourism business administration has resulted in a change in the mentality of families dedicated to agriculture, making way for a more business-focused vision.
- The number of tourists has increased, resulting in a 53% income increase for the period 2006-2007.
- Partners are more empowered, as reflected in the decision making of the board of directors, which periodically establish objectives and work plans.
- Through awareness about the adequate use of natural resources, there was conservation of flora and fauna on the farms and a reduction in chemical use.

- University EARTH lent its support in channeling of visits, the development of a website and a leaflet for both national and international promotion purposes.

Lessons learned

- It has been difficult to maintain group cohesion and common objectives, as varying levels of schooling exist among organization members.
- Financial limitations in implementing infrastructure improvements have led to a lessening of service quality of some farms.
- It is necessary to bring closer together governmental and private groups to the organization, to capture the support of other institutions that can aid in the improvement of processes and services.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Project conducted by the Community Development Program of Universidad EARTH.

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7



Corn heritage: a path that leads to community identity

Klaudia Cárdenas Botero⁹



COLOMBIA

This project took place in the town of Riosucio, in Caldas, Colombia.

A brief introduction

This project was part of the research done on “Stories on the Use of Flora and Fauna”, conducted by the author, which looked at the handling of plants and their use. One chapter was dedicated to the food tradition in the communities of Riosucio as a form of validating local knowledge, given that foods have indigenous origins and are part of the local heritage and also for information on recipes, preparation and handling of products, e.g. special wrapping (leaves).

Corn: king of local cuisine

In a modern, globalized world, traditional food is taking on new life, providing an added social dimension and serving in a new role by helping build community identity.

When in Riosucio and Supía one can visit the "Galería" (market place) where you can taste a variety of foods made with thousand-year-old corn; some of these are mentioned in a cookbook which lists some of the more traditional dishes of the region.

THE RIOSUCEÑOS COOKBOOK	
Dish	Process
White corn arepa	Round & grilled, roasted.
Yellow corn arepa, filled with beans	Round, roasted and fried.
Nalguitas de ángel	White corn cooked and wrapped in a bihao leaf.
Chiquichoques	White corn cooked and filled with bean stew, wrapped in a bihao ¹⁰ leaf.
Estacas	Yellow corn, cooked and peeled with ash, wrapped in a bitter cane leaf.
Tamal	Mix of yellow and White corn, cooked and filled with meat and stew, wrapped in a banana leaf.
Natilla	Yellow corn cooked with molasses. Served in a gourd.
Empanadas	Yellow corn arepa filled with stew of a large onion, tomato in a potato puree, fried.
Ogagato	A flat cake made of yellow corn (trillado) and ground cassava, sweetened with honey and molasses

⁹ Research Institute on Biological Resources “Alexander von Humboldt” – Use and Assessment Program - Use and Local Knowledge of Biodiversity Line. Sistematización de Experiencias sobre Alimentos Tradicionales con Identidad Territorial (Systematization of Experiences on Traditional Food with Territorial Identity). IICA-PRODAR – FAO INPhO. August 2005.

¹⁰ Bihao or « bijao » (Heliconia bihai) is an herbaceous plant, common in the Amazon jungle, in tropical humid forests and in the Caribbean. Its leaf is commonly used to wrap food dishes.

In addition to the recipe book, the author compiled 14 other recipes during visits to kitchen gardens, related to the use of plants as condiments, for soups, desserts, sweet and savoury baked goods and the use of leaves for tying, wrapping and packing different foods and products.

A story with two leading ladies

In Sipirra, just 15 minutes away from the main town of Riosucio, is where you will find Clemencia and Nelly Largo, two of three sisters who specialize in traditional food from the region, a practice inherited from their mother which they have done since they were girls.

Whilst Nelly's daughters are not involved in product making, Clemencia's husband and children help in the preparation of leaves, wrapping and selling in the market. Even so, it is feared that no one will want to carry on the Largo tradition.

Every week, Nelly (who sells the most) prepares 930 packages of estacas, nalguitas de ángel, chiquichoques and tamales, which represent a value of 214 000 pesos. 6 to 8 gourds full of homely made natilla are prepared (1000 pesos for each, 100 pesos for a serving); she also serves as middleman for some products, selling corn breads (1000 pesos per bag), cambray empanadas (300 pesos each), ogagato (1000 pesos each) and fritters (100 pesos each).

Conclusions

- Corn-based foods, as described here, are important in local consumption, with the particular preparation and presentation having cultural relevance.
- Despite its importance, corn has become a high end crop and is only found in a few areas, having been replaced by sugar and coffee.
- Work completed in the kitchen gardens offered a glimpse into possible nutritious alternatives for the family.
- Recognition of local knowledge allowed the strengthening of cultural values which have been overshadowed by social change.
- The results were shared with the communities. At a second stage, an educational game was carried out which presents the relationships between those with knowledge about the kitchen garden, gallery, the potters, the craftsmen and the community in general, based around the traditional Festival of the Devil. The name of the game is: "Your Majesty the Devil: Uses and Knowledge on Biodiversity".



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Cárdenas Botero, K. "Historias de Uso de Flora y Fauna con Comunidades Indígenas y Campesinas del Municipio de Riosucio – Caldas, Colombia". Use and Assessment Program– Institute Alexander von Humboldt (Colombia). Bogotá, 2003. Unpublished document.

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Cárdenas Botero, K; Galán, S. "Caracterización de usos de flora con comunidades indígenas y campesinas del municipio de Riosucio, Caldas (Colombia). Use and Assessment Program– Institute Alexander von Humboldt (Colombia). Bogotá, 2004. Unpublished document.



8



A family realizes its dream, combining production, environmental management and tourism

Olga Morales Restrepo¹³; María Elena Mejía Arbeláez¹⁴



COLOMBIA

This case developed in the Farallones Natural Park in Cali, Colombia.

Seventeen years ago, Olga Morales' husband took her to see the "Claroja" farm which he had bought seven years before. Excited about having a summer home, a 3000 square meter lot was purchased to achieve this dream. They called it the "Villa Elena Natural Reserve" in honour of her mother, who died at 42, with hopes of keeping her eighteen children together.

The beautiful countryside, weather and quietude created a desire to explore the untapped potential. Contact was made with the local Agricultural Technical Assistance Unit (Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria (UMATA)), which offered technical assistance.

“**The comprehensive development of the estate saw support in the form of training given by the Mayor's Office of Cali and UMATA, via the various NGOs that manage their projects.**”

The estate's productive growth

It all began with UMATA's delivery of rainbow trout seeds and the building of lakes for their harvesting. Today, the tanks hold a permanent stock of 3000, which allows for year-round sport fishing. The family feed the trout guava, which gives them a pink colour and a unique flavour.

The second productive element is related to the protection of the mountainside in the Farallones Natural Park in Cali.

Sustainable development on the estate has turned it into a kind of park covered in trees that have proven quite versatile, serving as a source of protein for animals and as a barrier against winds to protect biodiversity. This protection also extends into soil enrichment and water sources.

It was hoped that the third productive element – the kitchen garden – would create food security for the family; however, it has never produced in adequate quantities, due to the acidity and poor quality of the soil.

Small animal breeding was added as the fourth productive element in 2006, with a loan from Banco Agrario. The family built a pen in which to raise two pigs; and with the support of the Ministry of Social Welfare, a composter was installed.

Taking a chance on rural tourism

In the quest for sustainability, the family is preparing for the transition into rural tourism, also involving other sectors from the region. Via the project 'A Sustainable Model of Rural Tourism', the Ministry of Tourism of Cali offered training in: cooking, bartending, visitor care, host communities, environmental education, sustainable business techniques, organization of the community value chain, social organization and environmental improvement.

¹³ Manager and owner of the Project – Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali-SCT y SBSDC.

¹⁴ From October 2008 to January 2009. Turismo y Mas O.T – Compiler of the experience. IV Concurso de Sistematización de Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe (IV Compilation of Systematisation of Successful Experiences in Agribusiness in Latin America and the Caribbean). PRODAR-IICA 2008.



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Olga's husband and her younger (12 year old) daughter have been active throughout the process. Her husband handles the technical side and develops his own inventions which are made from recycled materials, such as a monocultivator; mesh weaver; lawn mower; carriage, frames and mirrors. Her daughter is involved in jewellery making, which has provided additional income.

As such, Villa Elena Natural Reserve launched its flagship program "Get Away from the City for a Day", where visitors can experience the rural lifestyle with a family that shares its space with the guest, in an environment that encourages rest and relaxation.

“ Gracias a mis ganas de emprender, al espíritu investigativo de mi esposo y a la compañía de mi dulce hija, nos hemos lanzado al negocio del turismo rural, cuenta Olga. ”

ACHIEVEMENTS

Application of technology	Productive development, recyclable material and reusable equipment.
Marketing	Image and package development as a tourist destination: The Art of Craft, Woman and the West, Between Christ and the River, Listen Look See Gallito de Roca
Partnership	Partnership with the community rural tourism association, 'Trochas'
Business Experience	Development of fairs and presentation of products at the regional level
Business management	Training in sustainable tourism promotion
System design	Approval of spaces, use and reuse of materials

POSITIVE RESULTS

- Although the community initially had reservations about the family's activities, over time, more than 30 neighbours have duplicated at least one of these activities.
- The family's income improved slowly but surely.
- They have become a part of the area's conservation efforts and have created: an increase in microorganisms that feed the soil; reforestation; growth and diversification of crops in the area (they grow 68 species); water protection and optimizing solid waste management.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Secretaría de Bienestar Social Umata Cali. Ing Jairo Clavijo. Tel. 660 0780 - 6602979
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PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT PROJECTS FOR AGROTOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT

9



Rural tourism adds value to coffee and milk chains in Venezuela

Martiza Cevallos¹⁵; Martha Desantiago, Verónica Pérez¹⁶; María de Rodríguez¹⁷



VENEZUELA

This experience takes place in the state of Portuguesa, in Venezuela.

The first steps of the program

The need to promote Portuguesa's development gave a boost to local, traditional agrobusinesses. In the initial diagnosis, there was a clear need to invest in tourism infrastructure, given the innumerable natural resources and existing cultures.

Thus, the Rural Tourism Program was born (in 2007) as a complement to the strengthening of coffee and milk chains, both key areas of interest of the Technical Cooperation agreement between the government of Portuguesa and IICA.

Consolidated action

The program was implemented in eight phases. In the first phase, a group of 22 facilitators/extension officers was created and appointed to the region; they were trained for working with communities, which formed a key institutional network for the coordination of the Program. The Network included organizations such as CORPOTUR, FUNDACITE, Environment Direction, FUNDESPORT, FONDOTURISMO, mayor's offices, service lenders and communities.

In phase II, activities began with the Rural Community Councils in eight towns being part of participatory diagnoses for the formulation of rural tourism strategies, consensus, prioritization



THE ASSOCIATION: OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The main objective was to partner enterprises in the state of Portuguesa with an institution that was capable of improving the quality of tourist products and services, promote marketing of rural tourist microbusinesses and participate in the development of sustainable public policy.

The Association is made up of more than 40 social enterprises and has participated in numerous national and international events. The recognition attained has led to establishing a commodatum for twenty years with Hotel La Coromoto so that it will, along with other institutions, operate a Rural Tourism Education and Training Centre. It will also serve as the base for a marketing company.

¹⁵ Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico de la Gobernación del Estado Portuguesa

¹⁶ Coordinadoras del Programa de Turismo Rural en Portuguesa

¹⁷ Consultora de Turismo Rural de la Oficina IICA Venezuela. Noviembre de 2008. IV Concurso de Sistematización en Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe, 2008. PRODAR-IICA.

and identification of assets and threats.

With phase III, there was a "Tourism Product Planning" workshop, which led to elaboration on the prospects for the Program. Strategies focused on the tourism product chain, health and food safety, project management and sources of finance.

In phase IV there were courses such as: GPS use, food handling, accommodation and gastronomy, tourist circuits, waste management, sociopolitical chain management and agroindustrial strengthening, among others. The microfinance system was adjusted and 33 enterprises obtained microcredit and technical assistance.

In phase V, a quality seal for the territory was determined, to certify the quality of products and services and to support marketing. The service providers in the Rural Tourism Association of Portuguesa created a Rural Portuguesa seal. Quality management and territorial conservation protocols were also developed.

Main results achieved

- Creation of the Portuguesa Rural Tourism Program office.
- More than 80 workshops in 70 communities, where 298 resources and modes of action were identified. More than 20 training activities.
- Georeference of 57 tourist resources and tourist services infrastructure
- Financing of 30 enterprises in areas such as accommodation, food and beverage and handicraft with an average total of USD 145 447¹⁸.
- Formulation of 39 project profiles and execution of 41 evaluation inspections and tracking of enterprises.
- Execution of 33 solid waste management diagnoses.
- Creation of the Portuguesa Rural Tourism Association.
- Institutional agreements for training, extension and education in rural tourism.
- Execution and participation in 60 national and international tourism events, a highlight being the International Rural Tourism Fair in Brasil, in August 2007.



- Design of three outreach pamphlets and distribution of 2500 copies. Three promotional programs on television.

Lessons learned

It is necessary to emphasize to public institutions related to the agricultural sector, rural development and tourism, to incorporate academic institutions and support research, attain participation from producers from the initial stages, encourage interinstitutional and intermunicipal relations, seek legal and institutional support, design a microfinancing system that suits local needs and execute collective marketing that is supported by the state.



In two years, fish production units have developed a gastronomy and complementary recreation product which adds value to the cachama (type of fish) farm. Coffee growers have been trained as bird watching guides and accommodation managers, incorporating bird feeders, eco accommodation and environmental education. Milk producers welcome visitors to their daily chores, cavalcades and observe the flora and fauna of their countryside. This has helped rural families improve both their quality of life and their surroundings.



¹⁸ Tipo de cambio: 1USD = 2,15 Bsf

SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Preliminary report of the Rural Tourism Program in Portuguesa. Arq. María Micaela Leal / IICA.
Annual report of the Rural Tourism Program 2008, CORPOTUR- Gobernación de Portuguesa.

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Reviving the ancestral way of life in Cajamarca communities

Vivencial Tours S.A.C.¹⁹



PERÚ

This case takes place in Cajamarca, situated in the north of Peru, in the farming communities of Caserío Laguna and Sulluscocha, located at 2700 metres above sea level and Centro Poblado Chagmapampa, located at 3200 metres above sea level.

In the beginning

Ana María Cacho, Mabel Solórzano and Mariela Jiménez, founders of Vivencial Tours S.A.C., met in the Faculty of Tourism Administration at the San Ignacio de Loyola University. It was there that they expressed their desire to set out into the private sector and conduct a study trip to Cajamarca, one of the three poorest regions in Peru, where the population is engaged in agriculture and livestock. They found out about an innovative agrotourism project, organized by ASPADERUC, which had been abandoned because of lack of funds.

Encouraged to give life to the idea, they created the “Agrotourism as a Tool for the Social and Economic Development of Rural Communities in Cajamarca” project, with evaluations that covered technical viability, social, environmental, market, economic and financial elements. The objective was to increase the standard of living of the rural populations in Namora and La Encañada through tourism and appreciation for their ancient Andean culture.

They entered their project into the Young Entrepreneur’s “Believe to Create” (“Creer para Crear”) competition, hosted by the Pro Welfare and Development Association (Asociación Pro Bienestar y Desarrollo). They won, having competed against 800 projects at

the national level, achieving the best score, as assessed by Wiese Sudameris (now Scotiabank) and mining enterprise, Yanacocha.

The award earned them funding for the entire project, at an interest rate below market, enabling them, in 2004, to realize their dream.

When ideas come to life

The project began by identifying and understanding the state of the local population; a study of cultural, natural, archaeological, craft, agricultural and mining attractions; and the development of new tourist circuits.

They later presented their project to the relevant authorities and the people, identifying communities that were willing to participate. They determined what problems existed with service quality and tourist activities and identified their infrastructure and budget needs.

The next step was establishing tourist accommodation and handicraft workshops. Similarly, local capabilities in cultural identity, conservation, waste treatment, accommodation, restaurants, business management and interpretation.

They also put a marketing plan into effect, integrating the activity into tourist circuits and conceptualized farm trips, press tours,

¹⁹ IV Concurso de Sistematización de Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe (IV Compilation of Systematisation of Successful Experiences in Agribusiness in Latin America and the Caribbean). IICA-PRODAR. November 2008.



AN UNFORGETTABLE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Vivencial Tours es la empresa encargada de la elaboración y puesta en marcha del proyecto, que pretende brindar al turista un estilo de vida casi olvidado: remontarse a los orígenes y alejarse del aturdimiento tecnológico de las grandes ciudades. La idea es que éste cambie totalmente de vida, volviéndose a integrar a la naturaleza, cogiendo la lampa y el arado para desgarrar la tierra y sembrarla como lo hacían, miles de años atrás, nuestros antepasados. El turista se adapta a una forma de vida sencilla, participando con los campesinos en la siembra, cosecha y crianza de ganado menor; bebiendo la chicha sagrada de los dioses, aprendiendo la preparación de alimentos típicos y los rituales realizados en homenaje a la madre tierra y a las deidades ancestrales. Los campesinos no dejan de asombrarse por la admiración del turista hacia su cultura, que antes les avergonzaba y consideraban inferior a la occidental.

participated in fairs, developed printed materials and a web page, as well as strategic alliances with the main tourist operators at national and international levels.

Results and achievements

- Saw an increased flow of foreign and local tourists.
- The project was featured in newspapers and television programs and various expositions at study centres and relevant organizations.
- Winning of the first prize in an international project held during the First International Meeting of Rural Women, Tourism, Food and Identity, in La Plata (Argentina) in June, 2008.
- Business initiatives were created within the community.
- Rural life was improved, reducing unemployment and migration.
- Local farmers learned to manage their resources.
- Women were accepted as an important part of family and community development.
- Accumulation of waste was reduced via waste management.
- Andean culture and outlook was validated, thus encouraging love and respect.
- Cajamarca was considered one of the most important agrotourism destinations, nationally and internationally.

Agrotourism: lessons learned

- It is an ideal development tool for poor areas, as the main attraction is the people themselves and the budding agriculture in the area.
- With proper management, ancient customs can be preserved.
- Allows for organization and distribution of sustainable resources.
- Stresses the importance of the woman in a society with a high level of machismo.
- Encourages large tourism enterprise to engage in community development.
- Recent government interest in regulating activities prevents bullying of the communities involved and prioritizes rural infrastructure.

“ We are in our sixth year of operation. The professional experience and economic interest have been important, but we are especially proud of the personal contribution we’ve made towards improving the standard of living of the populations. ”



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Vivencial Tours S.A.C.: Ana María Cacho Grosso (general manager), Ariela Jimenez Medina (vice-general manager), Mabel Solorzano Miranda (comercial manager).

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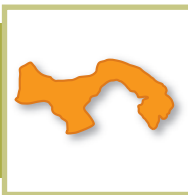
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Video “Turismo Vivencial” - Raqchi, Perú: <http://agrotur.ning.com/video/2106353:Video:3810> / Homestay Tourism in Cajamarca: <http://agrotur.ning.com/video/2106353:Video:1578> / Agrotourism in Spain: <http://agrotur.ning.com/video/2106353:Video:166>



Panamá bets on agroturism as rural tourism champion

José Angel Vence²⁰



PANAMÁ

This experience was developed throughout the territory of Panama.

Rural tourism's global history

The concept of tourists in a rural setting is not new. It began, informally, during the 50s in Europe under the banner of agricultural diversification. In the U.S., the 80s saw the emergence of the first agrotourism enterprises and in 1990, the National Advisory Board for Rural Development was created, recommending the promotion of rural tourism.

In Latin America, Chile has developed one of the most active policies with regard to the promotion of rural establishments which offer food and handicraft to tourists, through the support of the Agricultural Development Institute (Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario) and the Ministry of Agriculture.

In Argentina, before the growth of agrotourism in the 90s, the ministries of agriculture, livestock and fishing, as well as tourism, promoted a national rural tourism program.

The Panama experience

In Panama, the late 90s saw ties between the tourism and agriculture sectors being strengthened, with the relationship solidifying in 2000 with the signing of an agreement between the Panama Tourism Institute (Instituto Panameño de Turismo (IPAT)) and the Ministry of Agricultural Development (Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario (MIDA)).

“ ‘Agrotourism’ is classified as agricultural, farming and agroindustry activities that are seen as potential tourist attractions, on a farm, which generates additional income to that of the primary activity, in a move towards product diversification. ”

However, few advances were made because of various factors, ranging from lack of experience to interinstitutional meetings that proved overwhelming and riddled with technicalities.

Six years later and cognizant of agrotourism's potential, MIDA and IPAT renewed the interinstitutional agreement in hopes of strengthening the position of this tourism segment.

Developing the experience

The new project consists of agrotourism promotion via the adaptation of farms which have the potential to operate at a national level. It began in 2007 with the signing of IPAT-MIDA agreements and the recruitment of four farms per

²⁰ Coordinator of Special Projects, Agrotourism Project, Ministry of Agricultural Development of Panama. IV Concurso de Sistematización de Experiencias Exitosas en Agronegocios Rurales en América Latina y El Caribe (IV Compilation of Systematisation of Successful Experiences in Agribusiness in Latin America and the Caribbean), October 2008.

province. 116 farms signed up for the Project, with 60% meeting the minimum requirements necessary to host visitors. This unexpected level of interest resulted in Project coordinators having to redefine their strategy by creating alliances with national and international bodies. Five components were decided upon:

1. Training: training and taught courses were conducted in an effort to strengthen the human resource element in both the government and private levels, along with the development of a tourism services work culture.
2. Project formulation and evaluation: goals included guaranteeing the sustainability of existing projects, enriching them with new ideas and secured financing.
3. Enviro-Aesthetic Adaptation: the farms were made to adapt in areas such as hygiene, waste and pesticide management, security and consideration for the natural and social environment.
4. Promotion of agrotourism: the PROAGROTUR name was bolstered through the promotion of farm initiatives via internet, other media, publications, fairs, billboards, promotional videos and radio spots.
5. Project control and follow-through: a database was created for the farms involved in the Program and the internet was used to address the task of national integration.

Achievements

- A document entitled "Strategic Guidelines for Agrotourism in Panama 2007-2011" was developed and serves as a framework for the national implementation of related activities.
- In 2008, 20 farms received good practices certification for agriculture and security.
- A National Agrotourism Association was formed.
- Technicians and producers were trained at levels which meet national and international standards.



- Negotiations led to the creation of projects.
- Agreements were solidified at both national and international levels.

Lessons learned

- The Project began based on a study conducted in the late 90s which was rendered obsolete when recent real estate and tourist activity in rural areas is considered.
- Accustomed to state support, the beneficiaries of the Project were disappointed, as they did not consider the possibility of an investment without return.
- It was essential to establish clear rules regarding Project execution, such as the strengthening of institutional structures, application of profit indicators and the development of a norm for agrotourism activity.
- Some key elements were: the inclusion of agrotourism in the MIDA and IPAT program, training for producers and community organizations and information.
- To achieve expected outcomes, it is necessary to continue to build strategic alliances with Colombia and Argentina and with national organizations dedicated to tourism and training.



SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

Proceedings Manual of the Agrotourism MIDA's Project; files of the project's farms; experiences lived during internships to Costa Rica and Colombia.

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