

Tourism and Community Development: Family farming success stories

When I travel, I always try to organize my own itinerary, outside the conventional circuits of mass tourism. Travelling in search of other options can be a good opportunity to make your actions have a positive impact, benefiting the communities you visit. Among such options, rural tourism emerges as an ideal choice, aside from generating a unique and welcoming experience for your travels and adventures.

I have been fortunate to get to know great local family farming and rural tourism initiatives which, as a result of community efforts and involvement, have managed to develop and achieve a number of positive impacts on local community development.

Below are two examples of these experiences from my travels in Costa Rica.

EXPERIENCE 1- "IN SEARCH OF THE HOUSE OF ARTISANAL CHOCOLATE"

If you're the type of person who loves chocolate, you will be delighted by an experience like the one I had during a trip to the Caribbean part of Costa Rica. The visit was to the Bribri indigenous community in the Talamanca Valley, 220 km from San José, the country's capital.

To get there, take Route 32 from San José to Limón, and once in Limón take the route to Bribri, which will take you, after several kilometres, to Bambú, where there is a grocery store and a police station. If you are going by public transportation, buses depart daily from San José, but you should get off at Bribri and take another bus or taxi to Bambú.

The journey begins in a canoe along the Yorkin River, which could take a bit over an hour. There are no paths or direct access routes other than the river. The canoes are motorized, but the river has some difficult sections requiring some rowing and using your feet and hands. So from the beginning, this experience is already quite an adventure.

Through tourism and organic agriculture production, a group of different families have found a way to diversify their income and enhance community development.

For the Bribri community, the cultivation of organic cocoa is not only a source of income but also part of their ancestral culture. This is why they carry out tourism-based activities whereby visitors are invited to live with them, learn their customs and enjoy this exquisite wonder that is artisanal chocolate. And best of all, they teach you to prepare it and you can eat all you want.

I still remember the smell of home cooking coming from the wood- and gas-fired kitchen where they prepare the bananas, beans, coffee, and handmade chocolate.

Thanks to tourism, this community has benefited from increased income, having a direct impact on families, as they now have a school, a distance-based secondary education system and increasingly better infrastructure to cater to their guests and be self-sustaining.

EXPERIENCE 2- “TRAVEL, ENJOY AND LEARN ENTREPRENEURSHIP”

Can you imagine travelling to an exotic country and spending some time living in the midst of pure nature, in a house hidden among fruit trees, with its own garden, farm animals and lots of peace and quiet? But wait, urbanites, if you think you'll end up getting bored, forget it. From day one, you have a schedule prepared full of new and fun things to do and learn. This is all taken care of by a group of women entrepreneurs, who run their own rural family farming initiatives.

Tapping the potential of these enterprises, every year these women receive travellers from different parts of the world and their own country, to give them an opportunity to experience visiting, learning and working on their farms and orchards, turning these spaces into wonderful “green classrooms”, where they transfer their knowledge and experience.

Most of the guests are young students or volunteers who want to learn and know more about the experiences of family farming and rural tourism in these places. They come from all over. And they leave refreshed and amazed.

As always, I was fortunate to get to know them and work with them on a [video](#) that we prepared on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women.

[Here's the link if you want to see it](#)

Here are some more photos of us taking notes and documenting the experience.

[Photos]

HOW TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE ON YOUR NEXT TRIP

As you can see, a different kind of tourism is possible. Not only is it possible, it is necessary and is also gratifying in every way. Because not only does it benefit the local community and sustainable development, but, at the personal level, it gives us value, positive energy and the satisfaction of knowing that the benefits are shared.

Engaging in a type of tourism that promotes community development is a commitment to the present and future that is worth trying. What you receive is truly more than what you are capable of giving. But it is necessary to keep in mind some recommendations in order to get the most out of the experience.

1. Plan the most important details of your trip, but leave room for spontaneity.

As in everything in life, go along with any opportunities that may arise during the trip. This does not mean you have to go on an adventure without providing for important considerations such as safety and basic equipment. Once you are on your way, leave the comfort zone of letting others take you everywhere as if you were just a package, and be the one carrying the package (your backpack and your own itinerary).

2. Buy at the local market and talk to the local people.

This may seem obvious, but many people still do not know, do not care to make an effort, or fail to realize the tremendous benefits they provide for community development locally by consuming products produced by local families. Head out to the fruit market and the handicraft market, visit fairs and talk to people, who will surely give you some tips about less-promoted circuits that will surprise you and that you can learn from, and that surely have great tourism potential.

3. Adopt the local customs and spaces as your own.

For example, when you go to eat, watch where the locals go. If you see a place frequented by locals, most likely that's where the best dishes are served. I speak from experience. 😊

4. Turn to an agency specializing in community-based tourism or use the Internet to better inform yourself.

Visit forums and blogs of frequent travellers, who can give you tips about unforgettable places and experiences. Get to know local agencies and tour guides, and contact them to help you plan your travel itinerary in the best way possible.

5. Forget about what you think you are, lose yourself in the local culture, and live your experience to the fullest.

If you liked this post, if you found it useful or think it may be of interest to someone who is about to embark on a trip or a tourism initiative that contributes to community development, don't hesitate to share it with your networks and contacts! And if you want, leave me your comments and suggestions. I always find them useful to make the blog better 😊

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