

Community Based Tourism



Community based tourism emerges as an alternative to bridge the social and economic gap of rural communities, and is suitable for communities seeking to generate additional income in their daily economic activities utilising the cultural, natural and local resources in a particular region.

Community based tourism affords the inhabitants of the region to become tour guides and provide services to visitors. It also provides communities with an opportunity to play a role in generating movement in the elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given region.[1] Today community based tourism is in constant evolution, not only in the Greater Caribbean but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America, generating more active tourist participation in the customs and habits of a particular social group or locality.

Some local communities in the Caribbean islands have been able to identify opportunities within tourism and are participating in the industry, since activities where communities are involved in the design and implementation of tourism facilitate community participation with the aim of contributing to economic growth.[2]

It is necessary to strengthen the capacities of the institutions of the Greater Caribbean to support the development of community based tourism with special projects and programs where the importance of the participation of community representatives, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, as well as associations is enhanced by service providers in the tourism private sector.

Additionally, it should be clear that community based tourism entails a more participatory approach to tourism and has the ability to become a viable tourism product; for this potential to be realised there should be a close relationship between the plans of the public sector and the private sector along with the aspirations of the communities for the development of tourism in the region.

There are a number of benefits in communities participating in tourism development such as poverty reduction and employment generation. Additionally, this approach decentralizes the tourism industry through the transfer of decision making to communities, contributing to the development of

regional tourism products and leading to the strengthening of local communities while also acting as a stimulus for the production of local products to include gastronomy among others.

For the Greater Caribbean it is important to promote community based tourism initiatives from within the Region. There are examples of success in this area, as in the case of Jamaica, where the community tourism Network "Country Style" and the program "Unique Jamaica" have been successfully implemented, aimed at promoting community based tourism in Jamaica and internationally, offering visitors a diverse community experience during their vacations [3]

Outside the Greater Caribbean, Ecuador is one of the most developed and recognized countries that practise community based tourism. There are about 100 community experiences as well as training resources, which has resulted from the same self-managing business ventures of communities, in addition to the support which has been received from international cooperation agencies, non-governmental organizations, non-profit foundations and the public sector.

Finally, great efforts have been made to define forms of tourism that respond to the negative impacts on national economies and natural resources. Community based tourism is one such tourism niche, which provides benefits to minimize negative impacts and contribute to members of the communities getting involved to protect their cultural and natural heritage and also benefit directly from the Tourism activity which is generated.

With the aim of supporting all existing initiatives, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) with the mandate of CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) hosted the Meeting of Regional Tourism Organizations, with the main item on the agenda, Community Based Tourism as a means for the development of ethnic, indigenous and rural communities in the countries of the region. Among the results of this meeting, the creation of a Regional Network of Community-Based Tourism Initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean was proposed, which will share information on the different projects in the region and promote them as a travel option. Attending said meeting were representatives from the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA) who expressed their commitment to support the ACS in advancing this initiative. . The meeting was presided by the Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of Costa Rica, whose country at that time, was the President Tempore of CELAC.

[1] Rocio del Carmen, Documentary "Tourism and Community Involvement XXI Century" at the Autonomous University of Mexico.

[2] Mercedes Silva , Seminar on Tourism "Maximizing the benefits of tourism through Community Development "

[3] www.uniquejamaica.com

www.stluciaheritage.com

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