# Bachelor Thesis 2017

## Linking educational tourism and ecotourism: development and implementation of a sustainable eco-language immersion in Costa Rica

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Degree programme: Tourism, Module 786b

Submitted on: 27th November 2017

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## Abstract

Increased environmental and social awareness lead to a growing demand for sustainable tourism products. At the same time, intellectual activities with a high learning effect have greatly gained in importance.

Costa Rica has been playing an important role in the implementation of sustainable tourism infrastructure and practices. Thanks to its high biodiversity it has been successful in attracting eco-tourists from all over the globe. Offering a point of difference with its clear Spanish accent and the Ticos (Costa Ricans) being known for their friendliness and tranquillity, it is more and more chosen for language stays, foreign studies and student exchange programs. Merging ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica ensures significant benefits for both travellers and locals.

This study begins with a theoretical approach, which clarifies the two terms ecotourism and educational tourism and demonstrates the benefits of merging these two tourism forms in Costa Rica. It also provides the reader with information on current tourism trends and the concept of sustainable tourism development. Then, the practical part of this study shows the development of a prototype of an eco-language immersion for the language school 'Spanish and Culture' in Costa Rica. It focuses on one of the emerging tourist segments: aged 65+ years with consciousness of quality and relevance of socialising. Furthermore, the necessary steps to implement the elaborated tour in the tourism market are pointed out. Literature research and a qualitative survey, conducted as expert interviews along with previously elaborated criteria for the choice of local partners served as basis for this research paper.



**Keywords:**
Ecotourism, educational tourism, Costa Rica, language stay, package, sustainability

## Foreword and acknowledgements

My ever-increasing fascination with Costa Rica and its people started during my own visits in 2013/2014 and 2015 for several months. Ecotourism and sustainability have always been close to my heart and so have foreign languages and cultures. I am highly passionate about these topics which is why I want to dedicate this research paper to Costa Rica, particularly the language school "Spanish and culture" to which I have a very special connection. I met the founder and manager, Silvia Ulate Soto, during my first stay in Costa Rica at the language school "Academia Columbus" in Santo Domingo de Heredia, where she worked as a teacher. I had the pleasure to be her student during that time and developed a good connection with her. In order to keep up with my Spanish level we decided to schedule weekly classes via Skype once I left Costa Rica which we did for almost three years. During that time, Silvia noticed the incredible benefits of online Spanish classes, when she decided to do it professionally and created "Spanish and Culture". Thanks to various requests of current students to give recommendations or organize their stay in Costa Rica, Silvia recognized the huge potential to offer an in-depth experience to further develop the Spanish skills they gained during the online Spanish classes.

During my internship at the Extra Mile Company in Auckland, New Zealand, I had the chance to put together various itineraries for inbound groups to New Zealand and thus learned how to put myself into the shoes of the target audience and create a customized experience. Looking at my professional goals, this research paper helped me to enhance the various skills, which are needed for the development of tailor-made itineraries. Also, it allowed me to gain in-depth knowledge of the internationally most recognized country in ecotourism – Costa Rica.

Having been offered a permanent job in New Zealand and not being able to be on-site in Costa Rica whilst writing my research paper, made it a difficult but a very rewarding challenge. I learnt how essential personal connections are as well as how to effectively use them. My knowledge about the Costa Rican culture and people I gained during my two stays were quintessential for that. Furthermore, the various books I have read about the history, biodiversity and development of the country and the various papers I have already written about it back at High-School and University, were very helpful.

The time I spent and travelled in Costa Rica myself allowed me to experience both main touristic attractions as well as hidden gems. However, only with the ongoing support of Silvia Ulate Soto, who I would like to acknowledge at this stage, the creation of this project was possible.

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you to everybody who facilitated the carrying out of this project. I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Professor Rafael Matos-Wasem, for his support and helpful inputs, which I greatly appreciated. After having lived in Costa Rica for many years, he shares my passion for the country and its beautiful nature and was thus always a very important and insightful contact for me during the whole time of my studies.

Also, I would like to give my thanks to my interview partners which are experts in the field and gave me valuable recommendations for the development of a sustainable tourism experience in Costa Rica as well as provided me a with a lot of important background information about the implementation of such.

I would like to thank my boyfriend, Roldán Castro Hernández for his ongoing motivation and valuable advice. My biggest thanks go to my parents, Vreni and Georges Bouverat and sisters, Carole and Claudine Bouverat, who supported and encouraged me during the whole time of the composition of my Bachelor thesis, even though they were miles away from.

## List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| CST | Certification of Sustainable Tourism |
| DMO | Destination Management Organisation |
| ICT | Instituto Costarricense de Turismo |
| Pax | People |
| UNED | Universidad Estatal a Distancia |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNWTO | United Nations World Tourism Organization |

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# Introduction

Where else can you find 12 different life zones, 20 national parks, 26 protected areas, nine forest reserves, eight biological reserves and seven wildlife sanctuaries in one country? (Embajada de Costa Rica en Washington DC, no date) The small, peaceful and biologically diverse country of Costa Rica has been attracting many tourists and nature lovers from all over the world. In 1950, it abolished its armed forces and subsequently invested in health, education and sustainability. In 1970, the government set up the National Park Service to take charge of conservation with more than a quarter of the country's land now under protection and is thus often viewed as a model of good environmental practice. (Ruter, 2009). But also when it comes to tourism growth the country has no boundaries. Within 10 years the number of visitors grew from 1'725'261 in 2006 to 2'925'128 in 2016 (ICT, 2017).

The implementation of ecotourism was one of the most important milestones within Costa Rica's modern tourism history, which lead to influx of international visitors (Bien, 2010). It is responsible for the country's economic well-being and great employment opportunities. However, besides many advantages there are also adverse consequences such as the increase in environmental waste and pollution. Also, economic challenges and social concerns have arisen due to the exploitation of the local workers and profit taken out of the country due to the biggest projects owned by foreigners. (Ruter, 2009) Although Costa Rica is internationally recognised as the "birthplace of ecotourism" (Embajada de Costa Rica en Washington DC, no date) and has preserved its image as a green, sustainable and politically stable country, the reality seems to be a lot more complex (Ruter, 2009).

Even though Costa Rica is traditionally renowned as a major destination for eco- and adventure travellers, the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT) has been successful in attracting visitors for a wide range of other reasons such as business, culture, science and education. Educational tourism is one of the sub-sectors that ICT would like to see growing in the near future, as it often involves groups of visitors. (Lopez, 2015) To make Costa Rica stand out from other countries on that front, ground-breaking ideas are sought. This work shall combine ecotourism and educational tourism and include the following angle: the acquisition or progress of the Spanish language and therefore make it a unique and highly interactive experience for the participants.

The overall objective of this study is to develop an innovative and sustainable touristic experience for a small group of people which combines ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica for the language school “Spanish and Culture”. The methodology is limited to literature research, for the theoretical and literature part, and to qualitative expert interviews as well as the multiple-criteria decision analysis for the practical part.

The first part of this study gives a theoretical background about Costa Rica and defines the terms ecotourism and educational tourism. This part also demonstrates the benefits of a conjunction of these concepts and introduces the reader to sustainable tourism development and the three pillars of sustainability. The second part explains the idea of an eco-language immersion and describes the general objectives and requirements which were given by “Spanish and Culture”. A benchmarking of similar offers shows best practices which will be considered for the creation of the package. Furthermore, the selected partners for the package are presented and justified through previously selected criteria. In the third part, the elaborated schedule for the eco-language immersion is presented to the reader. Finally, recommendations for the successful implementation of the package are given. The last chapter presents the main findings from the research presented in the previous chapters.

# Research question

The following chapter illustrates the developed research question based on the problem statement and explains the general goal as well as the limitations of this study.

### 1. Problem Statement

Costa Rica is renowned as the birthplace of ecotourism as well as its ongoing actions to become a prime example for environmental protection and sustainable development. Though the implementation of ecotourism has generated jobs and had beneficial effects on the economy of the country, adverse consequences have arisen. To assure future success in tourism as well as ongoing economic, social and environmental development, innovative and sustainable solutions are needed. Besides eco- and adventure tourism being one of the major reasons to visit the country, Costa Rica has attracted visitors for a wide range of other reasons. With reference to an article in *The Costa Rica Star* in 2015, educational tourism is one of the sub-sectors that the Institute for Tourism in Costa Rica would like to see growing in the near future, as it often involves groups of visitors. To make Costa Rica stand out from other countries on that front, ground-breaking ideas are sought. This work shall combine ecotourism and educational tourism and include the following angle: the acquisition or progress of the Spanish language and therefore make it a unique and highly interactive experience for the participants. The UN's focus is to dedicate this year 2017 to sustainable tourism and therefore contribute to the development of local communities and focus on the conservation of our Planet Earth. This is another great reason to originate a unique experience, which is not only economically but also socially and environmentally beneficial.

The following research questions were formulated:

- "What are the benefits of linking ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica?"
- "How can a sustainable eco-language immersion be developed and implemented within Costa Rica?"

### 2. Goal

The goal of this work is to find out how the two tourism forms ecotourism and educational tourism can be interconnected within Costa Rica and which benefits such a synergy would provide. The ultimate objective is to then develop an innovative and sustainable touristic

experience for a small group of people, which combines ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica for the language school *Spanish and Culture*. To achieve beneficial results both for the attendees and the country itself (e.g. making a meaningful contribution to local communities, the preservation of the natural habitat), the focus will be set on the experiential method of learning as well as respecting all three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. This work is aimed at evolving the tourism market as well as fully immerse the attendees in nature; this expands their environmental consciousness and knowledge along with the possibility to broaden their Spanish language skills. It has the potential to revitalize Costa Rica's tourism by boosting its competitiveness as a biodiverse and sustainable destination for educational purposes.

# Methodology

The following chapter explains the methodical approach and presents the chosen methods of this study. At the end of this chapter, the limitations of this study are mentioned.

### 1. Literature research

For the theoretical part of this study, the data research was done online and offline. Information concerning ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica as well as sustainable development was found through several sources, amongst others through the *Instituto Costarricense de Turismo* (ICT), the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). More data was found in relevant books and online in reports, articles, reviews, surveys, papers and websites.

### 2. Discussions

Several extensive discussions with Silvia Ulate Soto, the founder and manager of 'Spanish and Culture' helped to determine the exact goal of the business development. The elaborated stages were pointed out and the limits of the project were defined.

### 3. Benchmarking

A benchmark analysis with selected criteria helped to analyse similar packages. Best practices were sought which helped develop the ideal package within Costa Rica.

## 4. Multiple-criteria decision analysis

The usage of previously elaborated criteria (e.g. sustainability, involvement of local community, authenticity, price/performance ratio) supported the choice of the most suitable partners for the proposed package. The criteria were either extracted from the theoretical part, given by the mandate of the project, or recommended by the interviewed experts.

## 5. Expert interviews

Various semi-structured interviews with influential people in the Costa Rican tourism industry were conducted. For this method, the ground and the main questions were defined and decided in advance. The detailed structure is worked out during the interview, as the interviewer follows the previously elaborated guide but is able to drift away in what to talk about or how much to ask. Semi-structured interviewing is a very flexible technique and involves only a small number of people. As open questions are asked, the interview partner isn't restricted in her or his answer headroom and one can therefore receive very valuable information. (Drever & Munn, 1999) These interviews allowed to receive first-hand information on the implementation of a sustainable tourism experience in Costa Rica and thus gain knowledge about important details which need to be taken into account. Also, questions related to the needs and expectations of new tourism products but also potential difficulties and risks of implementing such were asked. The interviews took place in October 2017 with the support of various methods. The following table one gives detailed information about the conducted interviews:

*Table 1: Interviewees*

| Name | Company / Organization | Position | Date | Type of Interview | Language |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Silvia Ulate Soto | Spanish and Culture | Founder and Manager | 03/09/2017<br>18/10/2017 | Skype<br>Skype | Spanish |
| Alberto Lopez | Instituto Costarricense de Turismo | General Manager | 11/10/2017 | Whats-App Voice Messages | Spanish |
| Mildred Acuña Sossa | Universidad Estatal a Distancia de | Head of the Tourism Entrepreneurship | 21/10/2017 | E-Mail | Spanish |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Costa Rica (UNED) | Chair and responsibility over Sustainable Tourism at the UNED | | | |
| Karianne de Rave | COOPRENA R.L. | Product Development Manager (Simbiosis) | 11/10/2017 | E-Mail | Spanish |
| Vivienne Solis Rivera | Coopesolidar | Biologist and Ecology Expert | 24/10/2017 | E-Mail | Spanish |

Source: Table by the author

## 6. Limitations

The research has been realised within the timeframe of a Bachelor Thesis. Due to this time constraint, the author has limited the information content of the theoretical part to what she found relevant for this research. Because of the big physical distance to Costa Rica, more precisely living in New Zealand at the time of the research, the practical part of the study is limited to expert interviews and previously elaborated criteria analysis. Lastly, unpredictable natural influences at times of scheduled expert interviews in Costa Rica (Tropical Storm Name) and later in the process (Earthquake) generated a much tighter timeframe. Thus, the author restricted the number of interviewees but deepened and extended the questionnaire for these. The practical part of this study is limited to the elaboration of a bespoke itinerary for a group of travellers as well as the recommended steps of realization and therefore excludes the actual implementation of such.

# First Part

This first part will give the reader a general background of the topic along and ascertain the overall significance of an innovative and sustainable touristic experience in Costa Rica. Firstly, the language school 'Spanish and Culture' and especially the circumstances of the business expansion will be presented. Secondly, the term 'ecotourism' will be defined as well as its development and growth in Costa Rica outlined. Also, the concept and importance of educational tourism in Costa Rica will be determined. This chapter aims to demonstrate the benefits of merging both ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica as well as introduce the reader to sustainable tourism development.

## 1. Idea and implementation of 'Spanish and Culture'

Spanish and Culture was founded in 2014, when the current owner Silvia Ulate Soto decided to dedicate herself to spread her passion for the Spanish language with people from around the globe, by giving online, personalised Spanish classes.

Silvia Ulate Soto was born and raised in Costa Rica and obtained a degree in Business Administration at the University *Latina de Costa Rica* and Education at the University *Castro Carazo* as well as achieved a diploma in English as a second language. After working as a Spanish teacher at the language school *Academia de Columbus* for nine years, she followed her dream to start her own business and created the company *Spanish and Culture* which should offer customized online Spanish classes including the acquisition of cultural knowledge via Skype for foreigners.

One of the consequences of the advancing globalisation is the stronger link between people around the globe. The significance of knowing foreign languages and acquiring cultural knowledge has thus been gradually rising. Whoever knows more languages is more attractive in the labour market and has generally higher chances of obtaining a job. Also, travelling is changing from a luxury good to a desirable acquisition and therefore the general interest in foreign languages and cultures has increased. Through colonialization and immigration waves, the Spanish language has been spread globally. With about 400 million native speaker and official status in 21 countries, Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in the world (Tinsley & Kathryn, 2014, p. 38) and thus of considerable importance globally.

Besides traditional forms of language teaching, a great number of websites and apps have come up in the market and offer flexible and effective ways of learning a new language. The broad choice makes it a challenge to position oneself in the market. For that reason, it was particularly important to Silvia to create a unique product with an outstanding service. The concept of *Spanish and Culture* conforms not only to the current society's rhythm of life but also brings considerable benefits in comparison to the conventional language courses and internet platforms. *Spanish and Culture* offers the opportunity to learn and practice the Spanish language comfortably from home and acquire cultural competences at the same time. It therefore enriches the language teaching, broadens the horizon and imparts additional intercultural competences. Thanks to private tuition the language teacher can provide tailored-made, interactive classes which result in faster progress as well as more efficient learning.

Today *Spanish and Culture* counts with customers from around the world. Classes are extremely popular amongst North Americans and Europeans with 60% of the students from Canada, 30% from the United States, 4% from Germany, 3% from Switzerland and 2% from the Netherlands and 1% from Belgium. (S. Ulate Soto, Director of Spanish and Culture, personal communication, 3 September 2017)

### 1.1. Business development

During her three years of successful business, the owner has discovered that many of her ongoing students are highly interested in visiting the country as part of their learning process and finally apply what they have been taught. She was told that especially her cultural inputs about Costa Rica arouse the students interest to get to know the country themselves. Therefore, several of her students have requested travel advice. After being asked to organise a study trip for a group of the United States and another one for Canadians, she finally concluded that the creation of special interest group tours within Costa Rica would be a great business expansion. The general idea is to complement the online Spanish and culture lessons by providing sustainable group tours which aim at giving an unique, deep and lively experience of the Spanish language through applying and learning the language whilst discovering Costa Rica's natural habitat. (S. Ulate Soto, Director of Spanish and Culture, personal communication, 3 September 2017)

# 2. An Introduction to Costa Rica

The following chapter will introduce the reader to the country of Costa Rica by outlining its characteristics, points of difference as well as important milestones in its tourism history.

## 2.1. Facts and Figures

Christopher Columbus was on his fourth and final voyage to the Western Hemisphere, when he encountered the lands of Costa Rica on September 18, 1502. The country obtained its name Costa Rica, or “Rich Coast”, by first Spanish settlers who came across gold and other valuable minerals. (Geographia, 2006) With a population of 4.91 million (Statista , 2017), Costa Rica enjoys a life expectancy of 79,6 years (The World Bank Group, 2017) and a literacy rate of 96%. In the year 1949 the military forces were abolished and hence the therewith connected financial resources invested ever since invested in health, education and sustainability. The country is internationally renowned as a model for “conservation in harmony with community development and economic growth”, which is characterized through its 12 different life zones, 20 national parks, 26 protected areas, nine forest reserves, eight biological reserves and seven wildlife sanctuaries. (Embajada de Costa Rica en Washington DC, no date) In 2009, Costa Rica was rewarded as the country with the highest rate of happiness (Happy Planet Index, 2009). With already 98 per cent of its electricity from renewables, the current president Luis Guillermo Solis announced that his country will become a carbon neutral by 2021. (Power Engineering International, 2017)

## 2.2. Geography and Biodiversity

The Central American country of Costa Rica lies between Nicaragua in the North and Panama in the South, bordering both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea (Centralamerica.Com, Corp, 2014). The country can be split up into the following five geographical regions: the mountain ranges called ‘Cordilleras’ which consists in the wealth of active and extinct volcanoes, the Central Valley with its capital San José, the Caribbean coast characterized by its alluvial land, the pacific coast and the peninsula Nicoya (Reiselexikon, 2017).

*Figure 1: Map of Costa Rica*

Source: (Lonelyplanet, 2017)

The heavy afternoon rain showers in the Caribbean lowlands and the Talamanca mountains during the rainy season manifest the country's location within the tropics, lying between 8 and 11 degrees north of the equator. Temperatures highly depend on location and elevation and range from tropical on the coastal plains to moderate in the interior highlands. The great Andean-Sierra Madre chain makes that Costa Rica is characterized by a jagged series of mountains and volcano, with its highest peak "Chirripó" of over 3'800 meters above the sea. The Caribbean tectonic plate overlies the Pacific's Cocos Plate and the two are continuously converging, enhanced by 42 active and 60 extinct volcanoes which are part of the Pacific Rim of Fire, an area of intense volcanic and seismic activity. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017)

With a rather small surface of 51,100 sq km, it owns a total of twelve different vegetation areas, such as mangrove- and marshlands or rain-, cloud- and dry forests (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). These numerous microclimates and its location between two coasts are some of the major reasons why Costa Rica contains, with nearly 6%, one of the greatest biodiversity in the world. (Embajada de Costa Rica en Washington DC, no date) There are more than 500,000 species which represent almost 4% of the total species worldwide. Costa Rica has implemented a large number of measures for conservation of biology and counts with more than a fourth of its land area being under protection. The country's extensive legal framework, which is characterized by the signage and ratification of various regional and international agreements, is meant for a sustainable usage of its biodiversity. Costa Rica's biodiversity is

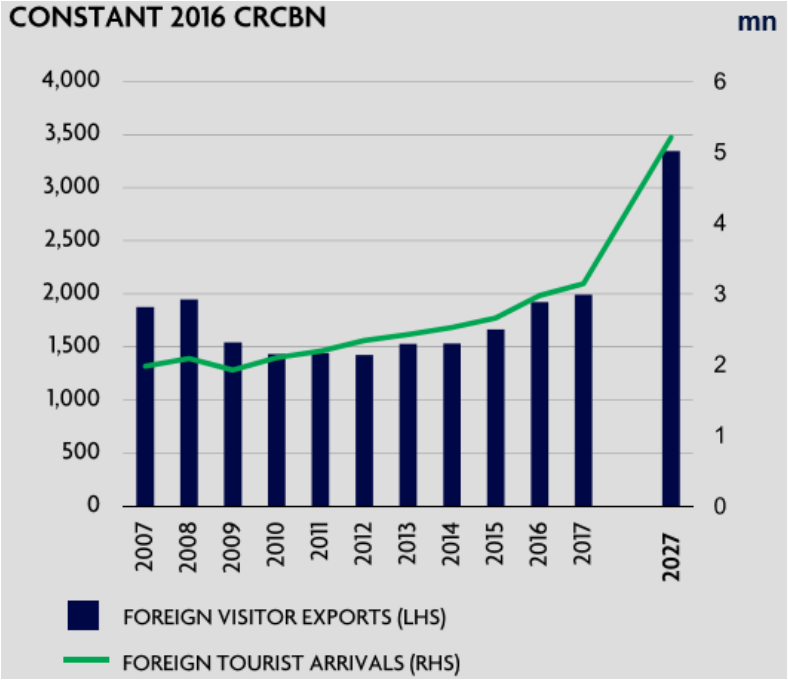
administrated by an institution called the 'Ministry of the Environment and Energy' (MINAE) and executed by the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), which has the responsibility over 11 conservation areas spread throughout the country. (Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad, 2017)

### 2.3. Tourism in Costa Rica: History and Growth

First signs of official Tourism in Costa Rica were tracked in the 1930s, when the government started promoting the first-class hotel "Gran Hotel de Costa Rica" in San José and set up its first tourism activity regulations simultaneously. The abolishment of its military forces in 1949 allowed the country to position itself as a stable and peaceful country. (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010)

Foreign scientists and researchers started to attend study-abroad programs particularly in forested areas in the 1960's, which marked the birth of scientific tourism in Costa Rica. Thus, their friends and families started to visit the country and formed the first nature-based tourism phase. (Bien, 2010) This phase is also seen as the birth of the so-called ecotourism (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010). In 1955 the *Instituto Costarricense del Turismo (ICT)* was founded. Its general objective consists in the development of tourism whilst pursuing various missions such as the improvement of the citizens living standards and preservation of the balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions (Rojas Alvarado, 2009). In 1970 the National Park services were enforced and led to increasing numbers of visitors within Costa Rica's protected areas. (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010) In 1985 an Incentives law, which should stimulate tourism investment, was incorporated (Rojas Alvarado, 2009) and impacted significantly the evolution of tourist facilities. After the tourism's negative impacts have been taken into consideration, predominantly followed by the aggressive promotion of Costa Rica as a mass tourism destination between 1990 and 1994, various associations were established and spoke up for a more sustainable form of tourism. Also, a certification on the environmental collaboration of hotels called "Certificado de Turismo Sostenible" as well as a program called "Bandera Azul Ecológica" to rate beaches cleanliness and waste management were incorporated. (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010) On the other hand, the tourism flow has been increasing exponentially, as seen on the figure below.

*Figure 2: Tourist Flow in Costa Rica*




Source: (World Travel and Tourism Council , 2017)

Within 10 years, the numbers of visitors grew from 1'725'261 in 2006 to 2'925'128 in 2016 (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2017). It therefore shows that tourism has gained greatly in significance within the Costa Rican economy. The tourism industry in Costa Rica, provides substantial contributions to the national GDP (Leland, 2017). Direct contributions[1] to the GDP in 2016 amounted to CRC 1'485.6bn (USD 2.7bn), which represent 5.1% of the total GDP. It is foreseen to rise by 3.7% in 2017 and 4.7%pa from 2017-2027 and to represent 5.7% of the total GDP in 2027. (OECD, 2016) The total contribution to the Costa Rican economy, including contributions stemming from the supply chain and investments, is even greater (Leland, 2017). In 2016, it amounted to CRC 3'853.8bn (USD 7.0bn), so 13.4% of the total GDP. The forecast is to rise by 3.6% by 2017, and to rise by 4.6% to CRC 6'239.2bn (USD 11.4bn), so 14,6% of GDP in 2027. (OECD, 2016) In addition to that, the currency import out of tourism has been taking a major importance in the country's economy. (Rojas Alvarado, 2009)

[1] The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP reflects the 'internal' spending on Travel & Tourism (total spending within a particular country on Travel & Tourism by residents and non-residents for business and leisure purposes) as well as government 'individual' spending - spending by government on Travel & Tourism services directly linked to visitors, such as cultural (eg museums) or recreational (eg national parks).

# 3. Outline of the relevant tourism forms

This paper aims at merging ecotourism and educational tourism. To be able to do so, both relevant tourism forms need to be defined and fully understood. The following chapter will focus on this question and demonstrate the significance and impact within various dimensions.

## 3.1. Ecotourism

According to the World Tourism Organisation, ecotourism is currently the fastest growing sector of the global tourism industry (UNWTO, 2012). It is used as sustainable development strategy in various developing countries and has therefore not only an increasing significance due to the growth of the number of tourists but is also supposed to provide local welfare. Weaver (1999) shares the common view that ecotourism can create economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits. Even though ecotourism has been an important pillar in tourism growth, the overall comprehensive approach of the concept is still surrounded by complexity and uncertainty.

### 3.1.1. Definition and principles

The diverse usage and different characterisations of the term ecotourism indicate, that no universal definition is existing (Black, 2007; Luck, 2003; Patterson, 2007). According to several scholars (Black, 2007; Boo, 1990; Brandon and Wells, 1992; Stem et al, 2003; West and Brechin, 1991; Wunder, 2000), ecotourism has a “two-fold development goal” which consists in both the environmental conservation as well as the local people welfare. (cited in Urias & Russo, 2009, p. 3)

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as follows: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.” (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015) The World Tourism Organisation attributes the following principles to the term ecotourism:

- The main motivation is the observation of natural areas
- Contains educational characteristics
- Small, locally owned businesses are involved in the destinations

- Minimisation of negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment
- Support of the maintenance of natural areas by:
    - Generation of financial benefits for host communities and organisations
    - Provision of alternative employment for local communities
    - Recognition of importance to conserve natural and cultural assets (UNWTO, 2002)

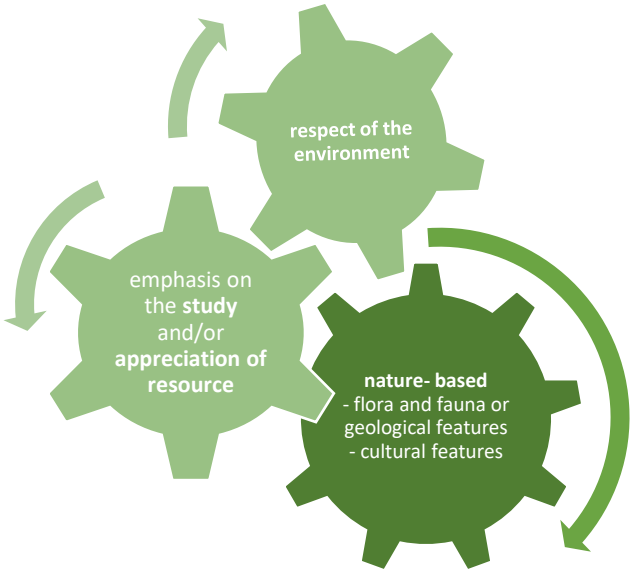
The International Ecotourism Society expands the above principles by adding the following characteristics:

- Provision of positive experiences for both visitors and tourism providers
- Development and usage of low-impact tourism facilities
- Recognition of the rights and spiritual beliefs of and collaboration with Indigenous people of the communities (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015)

Whereas the International Ecotourism Society attributes importance to the impact of a positive experience as well as the touristic infrastructure, others mostly don't. In fact, the up- and downstream sectors of tourism, such as the journey, accommodation and attendance on-site are hardly ever considered (Backes, 2003).

Per Weaver (1999, p. 793), "ecotourism […] should be coherent with the notion of sustainable tourism by adhering to the carrying capacities of the destination and being acceptable to, and supportive of, host communities." Weaver (1999) outlines three core criteria of ecotourism which are depicted in the below figure by the author:

*Figure 4: The three core criteria of ecotourism*



In brief, the term ecotourism implies various conditions but can be merged to a tourism form which preserves the environment whilst respecting tradition and culture on the one hand and educates visitors on the other hand and thus has a sustainable character.

### 3.1.2. Ecotourism in Costa Rica

Costa Rica is not only meant to be the birthplace of ecotourism but has also set itself as the worldwide top premier ecotourism destination. Amongst the diverse mix of tourist niches Costa Rica is attracting, ecotourism is the fastest growing. Since Costa Rica's government began to intensively support the development of ecotourism in the 1980's, a steady growth is evident. Honey M. , 1999; Minca and Linda 2006; Iveniuk 2006 and Honey 2008, all conclude that ecotourism is currently "the greatest source of foreign capital in the country, even surpassing traditional exports such as coffee and bananas" (cited in Braun, Dreiling, & Eddy, 2015, p. 354). As per figure below, it is estimated that over 66% of all visitors within the years 2014-2016 undertook ecotourism activities during their stay in the country. Amongst these, the observation of the flora and fauna, volcano visits, crossing of hanging bridges, diving and snorkelling, flying fox, dolphin and bird observation with equipment, speleology and cavalcade were mentioned in a survey realized by the ICT at the international airports. (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2016)

*Table 2: Estimated number of tourists by motive in percent*

| Groups | Total | Personal motives | Professional Motives |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sunshine and Beach | 72.1 | 80.2 | 28.7 |
| Ecotourism | 66.3 | 73.7 | 21.5 |
| Adventure | 53.3 | 60.0 | 14.6 |
| Well-being | 35.0 | 39.4 | 10.3 |
| Sports | 22.2 | 25.1 | 6.0 |
| Cultural | 17.2 | 19.3 | 7.1 |

Source: table translated by author (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2016)

There are a few key factors which lead to the development and significant growth of this niche tourism market in Costa Rica with the main one being its natural resources (Weaver, 1999). However, stable democratic government, pleasant climate, well established infrastructure as well as the highest standards of living and best public health care and educational system in Latin America are all crucial too for the establishment of ecotourism in Costa Rica. Even though the steady increase of ecotourism indicates big success, negative impacts on various dimensions have been reported. (Honey M. , 1999)

### 3.1.3. Positive impacts and criticism

The significant potential of ecotourism is demonstrated within various dimensions, but mainly the economic, environmental and socio-cultural. The tourism industry brings a large range of different positive and negative outcomes.

- **Economic impacts**

Ecotourism represents currently more than half of the total touristic income and therefore actively contributes to the GDP of the country. Besides financial benefits also numerous workplaces have been created and secured. This leads to young inhabitants of rural areas being motivated to go back to their native village after their studies and to work in the tourism industry. Several indigenous communities have started to implement ecotourism as additional source of financial income and thus built local organisations and cooperations to support and promote rural tourism and ecotourism within their areas of living. Also, it is worthwhile mentioning that ecotourism drove a number of rural areas completely out of poverty. (Bien, 2010, p. 52) Moreover, local small businesses such as restaurants, bars and shops have been established and existing ones generated more profit by the increasing number of inbound tourists. (Roberts & Thanos in Braun et al., 2015, p. 354) However, the price level of basic foods has been constantly rising, due to the growing number of foreign eco-resorts, hotel chains as well as investors (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010, p. 150).

- **Socio-cultural impacts**

With the strong tourist demand for the observation of rare animal species, the inhabitants of rural areas gradually began to discover the true beauty of their own lands. The strikingly coloured Quetzal bird is just one example of many animals that weren’t of major importance

for the locals in the past and suddenly highly sought after by foreigners. Generally, Costa Rica's overall infrastructure has been developing and improving due to the increasing tourist arrivals. But on the other hand, social problems like drug consumption and prostitution have boosted. (Bien, 2010)

Culturally-wise the influx of international visitors from all around the world has permitted to open-up the general perspective of the world of locals, since different habits, customs and traditions are shared. (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje, 2002)

However, due to ecotourism in ever-growing numbers, traditional craft in rural areas has been widely replaced by touristic and business activity. Even though indigenous people are included in decision making processes at times, „local people continue to feel excluded from key decisions regarding protected areas […] and are often among the last to be consulted". (Roberts & Thanos in Braun et al., 2015, p. 354). In addition to that, it is not rare that whole communities have been relocated from their territories without any warning in order to establish protected areas. (Braun et al., 2015, p. 355)

- **Environmental impacts**

In the Forties Costa Rica's environmental actions were highly controversial, primarily through the extensive deforestation. The foundation of the national park system set an end to that and marked a change in the way the country dealt with its natural resources. At the same time, researchers began to investigate the negative influence of this expansive growing tourist flow within the natural areas on the environment. Even though there were high aspirations towards the development of ecotourism in the country, the findings of researchers in that regard were rather disappointing. Ever since Costa Rica has been aiming for a more sustainable development of tourism. Nevertheless, direct impacts on the natural resources were almost inevitable. Especially fast-growing tourist areas such as along the west pacific coastline registered contamination of the groundwater and devastation of natural habitats. One of the factors which has nourished the trend towards mass tourism and thus simultaneously put the environment under pressure is the establishment of numerous big corporations, largely foreign-owned. These generally put the focus on the expectations and needs of international guests, without having an authentic and local perspective nor knowledge and consequently oppose themselves to the green, sustainable image Costa Rica

has been wanting to implement alongside its tourism expansion. As a result, the green, sustainable brand image of Costa Rica which has been spread throughout the world isn't coherent with the reality in certain respects and points out the insoluble paradox of ecotourism. The influence of visitors within Costa Rica's natural resources has had an influence on the behaviour and the alimentary change of various species. As an example, Capuchin monkeys eating mayonnaise at Manuel Antonio National Park, as seen on the picture below. (Department of Recreation, 2010)

*Figure 4: Capuchin monkey at Manuel Antonio National Park*

Source: photo by author (2013)

The journey represents the greatest environmental impact and needs to be taken into consideration as well, as it is part of a trip to Costa Rica. In 2016, 72% of all arrivals came in by airplane (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo , 2016). This implies that a considerable amount of CO2 emission is generated. Taking a long-haul flight from London to San José as an example, 2.5 tons of CO2 per passenger are emitted (Climatcare, 2011). Likewise, a tourist generally consumes as much water and power as an entire Costa Rican village does (Zeug, 2010) . This however, depends on the quality and sustainable integrity standards of the hotel.

In brief, it is questionable, if tourism in Costa Rica is as ecological as promoted.

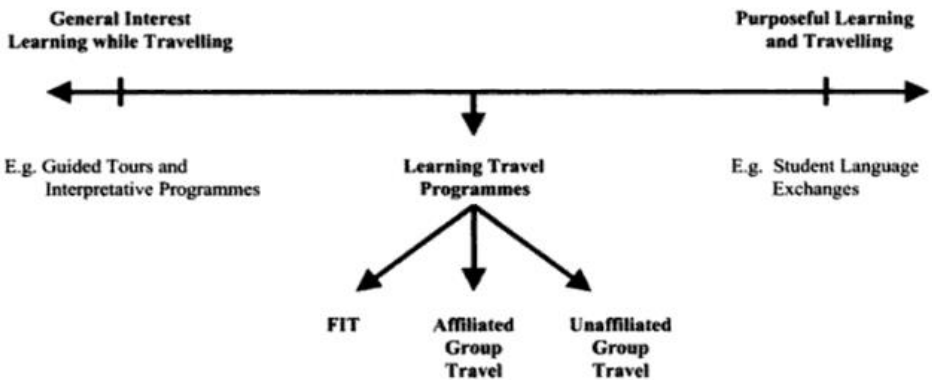
## 3.2. Educational tourism

Educational tourism has a long historical background. Already in the seventeenth century, scholars and aristocratic British left their homes for several years to go on a cultural and educational journey through various European countries during which they were taught foreign languages and affairs. General learning in foreign countries or obtaining academic qualifications abroad thus dates back several centuries. However, globalisation, a drive to extended learning and new demand tourist patterns are some of the main reasons why educational tourism has been steadily growing in the last decades. (Ritchie, Carr & Cooper, 2003, p. 5-12 & 26)

### 3.2.1. Conceptualisation and definition

The identification of educational tourism seems to be rather complex, which could be one of the reasons why this field has only been discussed by a very few tourism academics. Smith and Jenner generally consider tourism activities to be broadening the horizon, which implicates that all tourism could be considered educational. Kalinowski, Weiler and Wood limit the term to adult study tours and cultural educational tourism, wheras the Canadian Tourism Commision (cited in Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 11) also includes general interest learning whilst travelling and therefore education as the second traveller motive, as shown on the figure below.

*Figure 5: The learning / travel continuum*




Source: Ritchie et al., 2003

The model above distinguishes between three major segments of educational tourism, depending on the importance of the educational aspect during the stay. The segments also differ in the form the stay has been organised and therefore in the way the travellers can be

approached. Tourism-related impacts and needs also vary. The following differences can be extracted from the figure:

- ‘General interest learning while travelling’ implies that tourism is the main motive and the traveller only undertakes small educational programmes such as guided tours during her or his stay. It can be assumed that this form of educational tourism is predominantly based on spontaneous actions and rather not organised beforehand. These travellers can thus be reached on spot.
    - Example: 3 hours visit of a national museum
- ‘Learning Travel Programmes’ are a merge between tourism and education. This form seems to be the purest form of educational tourism and is split up into the independently organised programs or FIT and the formally organised ones.
    - Example: guided 2 weeks educational Inca ruins study tour in a group of 12 Pax
- Travellers visiting places for ‘purposeful learning and travelling’ are mostly undertaking language courses or doing an exchange semester at a foreign university. This implicates that education is the primary motivation for this segment. As the length of these stays are mainly several weeks or months, it is highly probable that these travellers undertake short weekend trips to discover the country they are undertaking their learning program and can thereby be considered as travellers too. The planning of the educational part of these stays is often done a long way ahead, whereas the travel part might be organised once entered the country and having familiarised with the different options. (Ritchie et al., p. 2003, 12)
    - Example: Three-years University degree undertaken in a foreign country

Secondly, the involvement of organisations varies considerably and is mostly tailored to each travellers’ motivations and purposes. This leads to a difficulty in the collaboration between primary and secondary tourism providers and shows why it is highly important to understand the whole entity of educational tourism. (Ritchie et al, 2003, p. 16) The Tourism Commission divides the supply side of educational tourism into primary suppliers and support services. Primary suppliers include venues for learning experiences, resource specialists who deliver the learning component, travel planners who develop learning programs and tour operators, whereas support services consist in general tourism infrastructure, marketing

companies and hospitality / travel services. It is the combination of both components which will create the overall educational experience (cited in Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 14).

After the above conceptualisation has been mapped out, a definition of educational tourism can be developed. Educational tourism consists in touristy activity which has primary and secondary educational motives and can either be formally or informally organised. The settings may vary between natural or human-made settings or include both.

### 3.2.2. Importance and growth

The importance of extended education and international experiences has steadily increased over time. Already in 1996, Roppolo mentioned the benefits of the incorporation of international experiences for both students and the tourism industry. Accordingly, Cooper endorses the increase of domestic school excursions as well as international immersions. (cited in Ritchie et al. p. 26) Also, the trend towards extended learning has solidified within the past decades. There is a number of different reasons which explain this unhalted hunger for knowledge and the associated growth of the educational tourism segment. The processing globalisation has supported migratory movements and company recruitment, which leads to higher competition and the needs to stand out from the mass. The fast-technological development and rapid changes on the economic and social environment request a broad general knowledge and flexibility. (Huwart & Verdier, 2013, p. 62ff)

The Costa Rica Board of Tourism has been promoting a diverse range of activities and has thus attracted a great variety of visitors from all around the world.

Even though eco- and adventure tourism have been the main motives to visit Costa Rica since many years, the ICT has been successfully attracting visitors for business, cultural, scientific and educational purposes. Education and formation as general motive for visitors still form a rather small part compared to other principal motives such as vacation and family visitation.

As per figure below, 1,2% of all visits in 2016 had educational and/or formational reasons.

*Figure 6: Estimated number of tourists per motive*

| Motivo principal de la visita[1] | 2012 | | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Turistas | % | Turistas | % | Turistas | % | Turistas | % | Turistas | % |
| **Total** | **2 343 213** | **100,0** | **2 427 941** | **100,0** | **2 526 817** | **100,0** | **2 660 257** | **100,0** | **2 925 128** | **100,0** |
| **Motivos personales** | **2 036 726** | **86,9** | **2 140 556** | **88,2** | **2 179 813** | **86,3** | **2 241 180** | **84,2** | **2 630 514** | **89,9** |
| Vacaciones, recreo y ocio | 1 688 562 | 72,1 | 1 819 719 | 74,9 | 1 903 744 | 75,3 | 1 939 288 | 72,9 | 2 168 225 | 74,1 |
| Visitas a familiares y amigos | 246 549 | 10,5 | 238 102 | 9,8 | 223 725 | 8,9 | 244 220 | 9,2 | 363 170 | 12,4 |
| Educación y formación | 39 493 | 1,7 | 28 405 | 1,2 | 20 261 | 0,8 | 19 154 | 0,7 | 36 219 | 1,2 |
| Salud y atención médica | 13 287 | 0,6 | 7 904 | 0,3 | 3 941 | 0,2 | 9 774 | 0,4 | 13 131 | 0,4 |
| Otros motivos personales | 48 835 | 2,1 | 46 425 | 1,9 | 28 142 | 1,1 | 28 745 | 1,1 | 49 768 | 1,7 |
| **Negocios y motivos profesionales** | **306 487** | **13,1** | **287 385** | **11,8** | **347 004** | **13,7** | **419 077** | **15,8** | **294 614** | **10,1** |
| Conferencias o congresos | 24 035 | 1,0 | 38 645 | 1,6 | 74 019 | 2,9 | 31 164 | 1,2 | 32 424 | 1,1 |
| Otros motivos profesionales (Reuniones, ferias o exposiciones) | 282 452 | 12,1 | 248 740 | 10,2 | 272 986 | 10,8 | 387 913 | 14,6 | 262 190 | 9,0 |

Nota:
[1]/ Estimación utilizando la distribución del motivo principal de la visita vía aérea y la Información de las llegadas internacionales proporcionada por la Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería.

Source: ICT (2017)

This number has been fluctuating in the last four years, with a steady but rather small rise within the last three years.

As educational tourism often involves groups of travellers, it is one sub-sector that the Costa Rican Tourism Board would like to see grow in the near future. (Lopez, 2015) Even though their principal interest is education, they are willing to participate in activities or travel during their free time or on weekends, which is an additional advantage of this niche tourism sector (A. Lopez, General Manager ICT, personal communication, 11 October 2017).

The Spanish spoken in Costa Rica is meant to be one of the easiest to understand, due to its slower rhythm and clear pronunciation (Jara Murillo, 2006, p.119). These linguistic benefits in combination with Costa Rica's closeness to nature as well as the friendliness, warmth and helpfulness Ticos are known for (Costa Rica Tourism, no date), make the country unique and favourable for language stays. As for instance, Costa Rica is one of the preferred destinations for North Americans aiming at learning or practising Spanish due to its natural beauty, from which they benefit during their free time. Marvin López of the Costa Rican Institute of Languages (COSI) remarked that the number of language schools have significantly increased within the last 10 years, from only around 7 to more than 80. (cooperativa.cl, 2001) Clear evidence of major potential for this tourism form is thus given.

### 3.2.3. Linkage between both tourism forms

The relationship between ecotourism and education has been described by various scientists and research entities as an effective and stimulating method to raise participants' awareness about the environment and cultural assets (Urias & Russo, 2009; National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 1990; Beaumont, 2001). Ceballos-Lascuráin states: "The main point is that the person that practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences. This person will eventually acquire a consciousness and knowledge of the natural environment, together with its cultural aspects, that will convert [them] into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues." (Caballos-Lascuráin, 1988, p.13) Such an experience thus not only drives to involvement in environmental and social issues but also builds a foundation for responsible travel and tourism. As per Beaumont, "the experiential form of environmental education provided by ecotourism is deemed more efficient in altering attitudes than classroom learning methods". (Beaumont, 2001, p. 320) It is said that fun and enjoyable activities in the natural environment which include personal involvement are key to stimulate eco tourists, which leads to the development of a rapport with natural and cultural resources. This form of tourism is also called "experiential method of learning", as it is a very practical method of learning which enriches the educational process. Through this different learning dimension pre-conceived values are questioned and reflected. This in the following can lead to personal growth. As participants engage with local communities it has additionally a reciprocal role and is therefore beneficial for both. An empowerment of native habitants can occur accordingly. (Oxford & Lin, 2011)

A study by Rickinson et al. (2004) showed that learning in the natural environment has positive educational, health and psychological impact and found that there is effect on the cognitive, affective, social/interpersonal as well as the physical behaviour of students.

Another study links the environment with personal health and demonstrates that various mental health issues which make focusing in traditional classrooms difficult can be lowered by the exposure to the natural habitat. (Kaplan, 1995)

Duenkel and Scott (1994, in Sander, 2010) demonstrate a more philosophical approach in which ecotourism, if the educational aspect is present to a certain extent, can change the

habitual reality of tourists to one which is more environmentally friendly inclusive. The objective is to transmit the significance of personal actions on the well-being of other beings such as plants and animals and thus educate the tourists in a way that they realize to be part of a coherent unit.

# 4. Sustainable Tourism Development

In this part, relevant literature research on sustainability and the importance of sustainable tourism development are mapped out. Furthermore, the major steps on how to create a sustainable touristic experience are initiated. This part is the key link between the theoretical part and the practical part of the study.

## 4.1. What is Sustainable Tourism Development?

The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism development as follows: "Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support system" (World Tourism Organisation, 1998, p. 19, cited in Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2009). It is thus based on a long-term perspective and is characterized by four main components: supporting the well-being of communities and the protection of natural and cultural resources, applying adequate management and constantly monitoring as well as ensuring tourism products are of high quality standards which leads to tourist satisfaction. (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004) Sustainable tourism development aims at a beneficial impact on the local communities and the natural environment. (UNESCO, 2010)

In 1991 the Tourism Concern and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature composed a list of principles and guidelines, which show the close link between ecotourism and sustainable development, as per Table 3 hereafter:

Table 3: Sustainability guidelines

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Using resources sustainably | The conservation and sustainable use of resources - natural, social, cultural, - is crucial and makes long-term business sense. |
| 2. Reducing over consumption and waste | Reduction of over-consumption and waste avoids the costs of restoring long-term environmental damage and contributes to the quality of tourism. |
| 3. Maintaining Biodiversity | Maintaining and promoting natural, social, and cultural diversity is essential for long-term sustainable tourism, and creates a resilient base for the industry. |
| 4. Integrating tourism into planning | Tourism development which is integrated into a national and local strategic planning framework and which undertakes environmental impact assessments, increase the long-term viability of tourism. |
| 5. Supporting local economies | Tourism that supports a wide range of local economic activities and which takes environmental costs and values into account, both protects these economies and avoids environmental damage. |
| 6. Involving local communities | The full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector not only benefits them and the environment but also improves the quality of the tourism project. |
| 7. Consulting stakeholders and the public | Consultation between the tourism industry and local communities' organizations and institutions is essential if they are to work alongside each other and resolve potential conflicts of interest. |

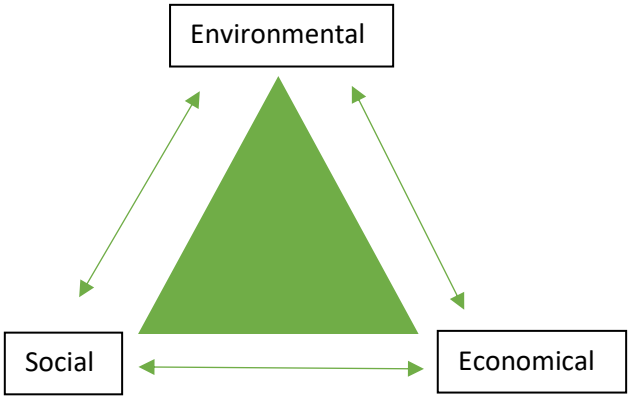
| | |
|---|---|
| 8. Training Staff | Staff training which integrates sustainable tourism into work practices, along with recruitment of personnel at all levels, improves the quality of the tourism product. |
| 9. Marketing tourism responsibly | Marketing that provides tourists with full and responsible information increases respect for the natural, social and cultural environments of destination areas and enhances customer satisfaction. |
| 10. Undertaking research | Ongoing research and monitoring by the industry using effective data collection and analysis is essential to help solve problems and bring benefits to destinations, the industry and consumers. |

Source: (Blamey, 2001, in Weaver, 2001)

### 4.1.1. Sustainable Development Triangle

Even though there are several models which have been created to explain the concept of sustainable tourism, one of them is prevalent. Represented by a triangle as shown in Figure 7, it demonstrates the aspiration of balance among the economic development, environmental impacts as well as the society and its future generations. (Blamey, 2001, in David B. Weaver, 2001, p. 12) All three sides of the triangle need to harmonise with each other to achieve sustainable development. Provided that all three areas of the triangle are respected, ecotourism can be considered as a form of sustainable development.

*Figure 7: Sustainability Triangle*




Source: table by the author

### 4.1.2. Sustainability of Ecotourism

Ecotourism generally aims at reducing negative impacts on the visited areas as well as the contribution to the conservation of natural areas. Also, it fosters the sustainable development of communities. At large, it generates further awareness among residents, nearby population and the visitors themselves. The UNESCO considers this particular form of tourism as one of the most common forms of sustainable tourism. (UNESCO, 2010)

Robert Powell (2008) defines the sustainability of ecotourism as the interdependence of the following E factors: environmental conservation, equity, education, and economic benefits. In terms of education Powell states that, "through tour design and interpretation, [ecotourism can] mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, both human and environmental, and build an educated and motivated constituency that supports environmental conservation and social improvements, both on site and at home." (Powell & Sam, 2008, p. 468)

## 4.2. Why is sustainable tourism development important?

Tourism has become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world and is a fundamental source of income in many countries. It currently represents about over 7% of the world's exports in goods and services and is even the major export sector in many developing countries. Numbers of international travel were expected to increase by 3.3% a year and even by 4.4% in emerging destinations between 2010 and 2030. In 1960 the number of international tourist arrivals were counted to 25.3 million whereas the World Tourism Organisation forecasts 1.6 billion for the year 2020. (World Tourism Organization, 2016) Whereas other industries depend on goods and services, tourism is essentially related to natural areas and cultural resources. This intensive usage and consumption has considerable impacts on the economy, environment, ecosystems, societies and cultures. Tourism resources and attractions should therefore be consumed responsibly in order to conserve them for future generations. (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004)

Already in 1998, Francesco Frangialli, UNWTO Secretary-General at that time, underlined the potential of tourism to alleviate poverty, partly through the creation of jobs for indigenous people in rural areas. He anticipated tourism to grow massively in the next decades which led to the significance of environmental protection. (UNESCO, 2010)

### 4.3. International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017

The United Nations dedicate this year 2017 to the conservation of our Planet Earth and declared it as the *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development*, with respect to the universal Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve the overall goal of a more sustainable tourism sector, business customs and policies need to be revised as well as consumer behaviour changed. The following five key areas were chosen for the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development:

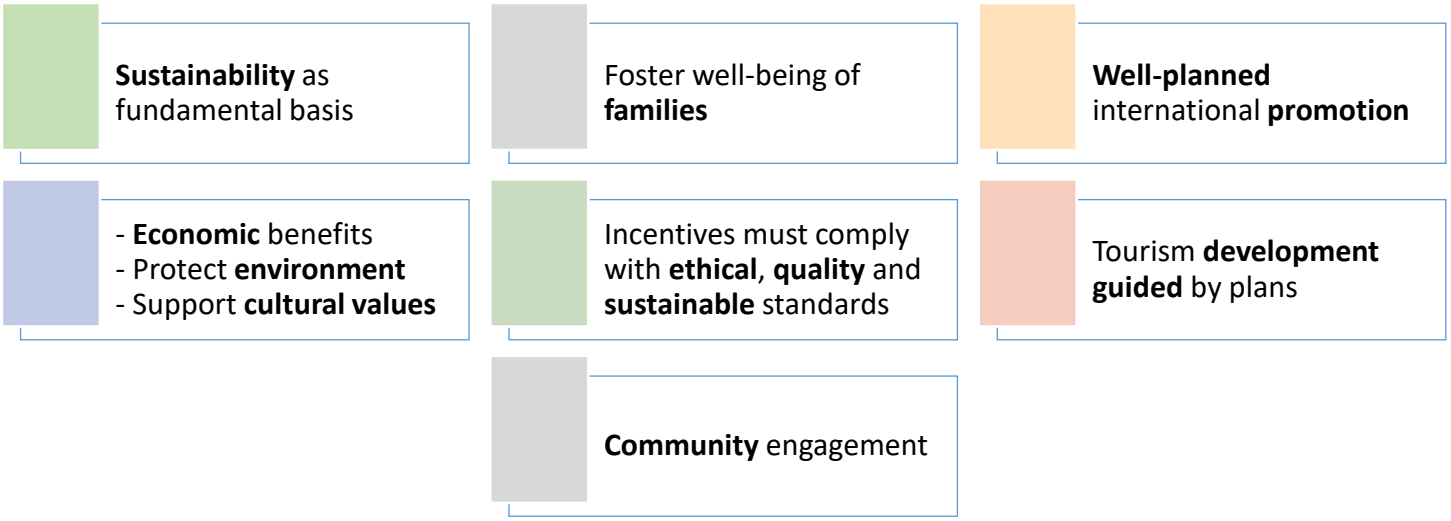
- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth
- Social Inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction
- Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change
- Cultural values, diversity and heritage
- Mutual understanding, peace and security

(World Tourism Organization, 2015)

### 4.4. Costa Rican Sustainability principles and certification program

The following figure illustrates the major principles, which have been established by the Costa Rica Tourism Board and are taken into consideration for any ongoing and future tourism actions:

*Figure 8: Principles of Tourism Action in Costa Rica*




Source: table by the author (with reference to OECD, 2016)

As can be seen from the figure above, tourism should not only be an economic driver for the country but also fulfil various secondary objectives and ensure to maintain its forerunner role as a sustainable tourism destination. It is therefore important to keep these principles in mind when developing a new tourism experience.

Even though tourism activity is increasing exponentially, there is a few challenges faced by Costa Rica which cannot be overlooked and will certainly shape its future success. Amongst them are the implementation of tourism regulations and information technology, the progress in health and safety issues, the development of an efficient transportation and infrastructure system and finding a sustainable way of dealing with culture resources and the environment. Furthermore, the elaboration of more accurate data on tourism performance in order to give advisory and proper training programs is an improvement which will need to be done shortly. Also, tourism growth hasn't been equally strong in all regions. Especially the coastal areas still have potential. This however, will need to be planned well in order to comply with environmental and cultural ethics. (OECD, 2016)

#### 4.4.1. Certification for Sustainable Tourism

Though a global certification process hasn't been forced through, many countries have developed their own certification program – and so did Costa Rica with the Certification of Sustainable Tourism (CST). (Honey M., 2008) Being created in 1997 it is one of the first frameworks to analyse sustainable practices within the tourism industry and aims at sharing it with other nationalities in order to promote sustainable tourism on a global scale. (United Nations, 2016). Operating tourism businesses such as hotels, tour operators, attractions or car rentals, can be given one to five green leaves, depending on their environmental, social and community responsibility (Honey, 2008, p. 203f) The following four areas are evaluated:

- The interaction between the business and the environment
- The correlated actions the business realizes to motivate the tourists' participation in the sustainability process
- The grade of inclusion with local communities and the interaction with them
- Hotels: internal processes such as waste management, energy and water usage
- Tour Operators: the process of designing a tourism product with focusing on the market trends and the characteristics of the country.

Figure 9 shows the percentage a tourism business needs to comply in order to obtain a certain level of certification:

*Figure 9: Level of Certification based on Performance*

| Level | % Performance |
|---|---|
| 0 | < 20 |
| 1 | 20-39 |
| 2 | 40-59 |
| 3 | 60-79 |
| 4 | 80-94 |
| 5 | > 95 |

Source: Certificación para la Sotenibilidad Turística, 2016

The higher the level of certification, the better a business can differentiate itself and, at the same time, the more educational support and participation opportunities in fairs and events it receives. (Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística, 2016)

The associated benefits of implementing the CST are widespread, but mainly cost-reduction, increased occupancy and a better image for businesses, a differientiation in the promotion of tourism on a large scale, as well as environmental and social security for locals. (United Nations, 2016) Moreover, the tourist can be assured that the business is active in the reduction of negative impacts of tourism activity on the environment, culture and society. (Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística, 2016)

## 4.5. Sustainable Tourism product development

Whereas other industries keep rather constant in regard to product development and diversification, tourism is exposed to permanent change. New products are introduced to the tourism market constantly. It is important to realize the importance of tourism trends for the creation of a new product to be able to create considerable market differentiation and thus have a sucessful market entry. (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004)

### 4.5.1. Current Trends

The following behavioural trends dominate the tourism market:

- Increased environmental and social awareness
- Extensive travel experience and thus higher consciousness of quality and value for money
- Seeking for completely different destinations and innovative tourism products
- Tourists become more physically and intellectually active
- New segments such as older and challenged people
- Use of new technologies (internet)
- More frequent but shorter holidays taken throughout the year
- Increase of good quality and sustainable tourism offer within tourism destinations

The following activities and tourism areas have gained major importance recently:

- Participation in recreation, sports and adventure
- Learning about culture history and the natural areas of the places visited
- Adventure, cultural, nature, 'roots'(tourism visiting their ancestral home areas), health and religious tourism
- Culture and ecotourism as instrument to protect the natural and cultural resources

(Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004, p.4)

### 4.5.2. The tourism chain and related product items

A tourism product consists of multiple elements such as transport, accommodation, food and drinks, activities etc. and is hence described as a chain. The experience starts at home and ends when a tourist returns. (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004) In consequence, every single element of the tourism chain is of importance in order to have a satisfactory experience. Figure 10 shows the different stages of a touristic experience, the correlated items and their providers.

*Figure 10: Stages of a touristic experience*

| Stage | Client's activity | Means (product items) | Provider |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Preparation | Generating interest | Marketing, information, advert. | Travel agencies, destination managements. |
| | Product check-out and reservation | Marketing, advert, information and communication channels. | Travel agencies, destination managements, providers of various services. |
| | Preparation of equipment and gear | Purchase, repairs, rental. | E.g. salesmen of equipment for sport, hiking and traveling, bookshops, photo-shops, equipment rentals and repairs, etc. |
| 2. Journey | Transport from home to a tourist destination | Car, bus, train, ship, plane, bicycle, on foot. | Transport companies, car and bike rentals, traffic infrastructure operators (train stations, airports, etc.) |
| 3. Stay | Accommodation | Hotels, guest houses, hostels, camps and other facilities. | Operators of facilities. |
| | Taking meals | Restaurants, own preparation, etc. | Operators of facilities, shopkeepers. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Free-time activities | Hiking, sport, relaxing, etc. | Guides, instructors, sellers of equipment, operators of playgrounds and other centers, etc. |
| | Learning activities | Visiting museums and castles, sightseeing in towns and their vicinities, and the like. Visiting protected territories and the like. | Managers of facilities and territories, tour-guides, bookshops, etc. |
| | Cultural activities | Concerts, festivals, custom presentations and the like. | Managers of facilities, music bands and theatre troupes, and the like. |
| | Working activities | Meetings, seminars, exhibitions, fairs, conferences, presentations, excursions, etc. | Providers of facilities, interpreters. |
| | Shopping and local service | Purchase of souvenirs and local products. Purchase of other necessities (photo-video, magazines, etc.).<br>Banks, money exchange, car repairs, health care and the like.<br>Transportation services. | Craftsmen, producers and sellers of souvenirs and local products. Shops in the locality.<br>Bank and exchange service providers, car repair owners, health care facilities, and the like.<br>Transportation companies, taxi, car and bike rentals. |
| | Other activities. | Spa service, educational activities and the like. | Operators of facilities, providers of services, and others. |
| **4. Journey back home** | Transport from tourist destination home. | Car, bus, train, ship, plane, bicycle, on foot. | Transport companies, car and bike rentals, traffic infrastructure operators (train stations, airports, etc.) |
| **5. Activities after returning home** | Equipment - maintenance and repair works. | Washing, cleaning, etc.<br>Repairing items, and the like. | Laundries, car/bike repairs, craftsmen and the like. |
| | Recording and sharing of memories. | Making photographs, writing articles or web-pages, participating in discussion and other meetings, etc. | Photo-labs, providers of information and communication technologies, operators of facilities. |

Source: (Ecological Tourism, 2004)

### 4.5.3. Basic steps of product development and people involved

The development of a tourism product, involves a wide range of stakeholders which can be divided into the three following main groups:

- Individual service providers (e.g. accommodation providers, restaurants, transport agencies, tour guiding providers, activity providers)
- Travel agencies and tour-operators
- Destination management organizations (DMOs)

In order to develop a tourism product, the following four steps need to be carried out:

- Assessment of the potential of the natural and cultural heritage as well as existing attractions, facilities and services
- Identification of target markets and groups
- Design of the product
    - Combine elements of the product and create a package
    - Planning, conceptualizing, branding the product

That this step can be executed, full understanding of the above displayed tourism chain and its involved players is essential. In pursuance of sustainable product development and support regional advancement, all dimensions of the tourism sector and its related sectors need to be considered.

- Marketing of the product

Aiming at sustainable development of a region through the implementation of a tourism product means adapting all elements of the tourism chain with regards to its sustainability aspects. On a second level, also its placement in the economy can make a significant difference. Whilst creating a sustainable tourism product, all three principles of economic, environmental and social sustainability need to be fulfilled and thus the following factors must be considered:

- Conservation of the biodiversity and natural resources and strengthen importance of doing so among residents and customers
- Local participation as well as improved living standards, local empowerment, poverty reduction of local inhabitants and positive cultural exchanges between consumers and producers/locals
- Long-term profitability for tourism business through innovative products

(Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004)

# Second part

## 1. Proposal of the experience

The advantages and benefits of the conjunction of ecotourism and educational tourism in Costa Rica have been demonstrated in the first part of this work. The following part will focus on the conceptualization of the eco-language immersion. Firstly, the general objectives and requirements as well as the target audience will be outlined. Secondly, a benchmarking of several similar offers will reveal best practices which will be considered for the eco-language immersion. Lastly, the chosen destinations and local partners will be presented and justified.

### 1.1. Mandate and project objectives

The language school "Spanish and Culture" is currently focusing on online language and culture classes. The founder and general manager, Silvia Ulate Soto would like to provide a supplement to the existing offer which would allow her current students as well as other interested people to totally immerse themselves in the Spanish language whilst diving into the Costa Rican natural habitat as well as local lifestyle. The overall goal is to develop an innovative and sustainable touristic experience for a small group of travellers, which combines ecotourism and educational tourism. To achieve beneficial results both for attendees and the country itself (e.g. making a meaningful contribution to local communities, the preservation of the natural habitat), the focus will be set on the experiential method of learning as well as respecting all three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. The experience is aimed at evolving the tourism market as well as fully immerse the attendees in nature; this expands their environmental consciousness and knowledge along with the possibility to broaden their Spanish language skills. It has the potential to revitalize Costa Rica's tourism by boosting its competitiveness as a biodiverse and sustainable destination for educational purposes.

### 1.2. The concept of an "eco-language immersion"

There are various providers of touristic packages within Costa Rica. Some of them focus on environmental learning through the participation in conservatory projects, others on the language learning, while yet others offer to get to know several sustainable or environmental pioneer projects throughout the country whilst discovering the natural beauty. However,

there is a market gap for a package which consists in both language and environmental learning. As the theoretical part of this study showed, the benefits of such are considerable. The idea of an “eco-language immersion” consists in the learning and practice of the Spanish language as well as about the environment whilst being fully immersed in Costa Rica’s nature and culture. The term “eco” derives from the word ecology and is used informally to reveal that the environment isn’t harmed (Oxford University Press, 2017). The term “eco-language immersion” was created by the manager of “Spanish and Culture” in collaboration with the author.

### 1.3. Target group

The main target group has been set on existing Spanish students of “Spanish and Culture” which have been familiarized with the language to an intermediate level which provides them the ability to interact with locals as well as to understand the content of the lessons and to have the aim to improve their skills. It is important, as per manager of the language school, that the group is quite homogenous, with a very similar level of Spanish. This in order to provide the most adequate and customized trip as well as language lessons. The age group of 65+ seems to be ideal, as retired people have enough time and financial resources.

## 2. Benchmarking Analysis

The following benchmarking analysis compares various existing offers. Once the different offers are outlined and analysed, best practices will be identified. In order to stimulate brainstorming for the development of the eco-language immersion, a wide spectrum of offers was chosen. To ensure that offers are comparable, the author chose to restrict the geographical area to Latin America. Furthermore, it is of importance to determine potential competitor projects in nearby surroundings. The following offers of selected organizers will be presented briefly and the choices justified:

**Horizontes Nature Tours** is an industry leader with over 30 years of experience. They offer personalized educative and adventure tours which are committed to all three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental and social. Their commitment to the environment involves: energy efficiency, water management, protection of national patrimony. They strive

for a positive social impact through respecting cultural integrity, privacy and beliefs of local communities and facilitation of development. Also, the company endeavours to strengthen its employees' commitment to social and environmental responsibility. The suppliers Horizontes Nature Tours are working with, have either an integrated environmental management system and/or are certified. Horizontes Nature Tours pride themselves with local knowledge and have some of the world's best naturalist guides in their team. (Horizontes Nature Tours Costa Rica, 2015)

- Costa Rica – Hands on Learning

This ten-day experience provides participants with an in-depth immersion into corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, best environmental practices as well as innovative and sustainable business solutions whilst discovering Costa Rica's favourite volcanoes, beaches and national parks. Horizontes is a well-established industry leader whose offer in the aspects of environmental learning is similar to what this study aims to develop. The offer includes a catalogue of topics, which the participants can freely choose from and thus provides guidance for the proposal preparation.

**ITHACA College New York**

ITHACA College is a private college in New York, which integrates sustainability into daily practice. (ITHACA College, no date)

- Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica

The offered program is a 3 Credits University course for enrolled students, who are able to learn about sustainable practices on spot in Costa Rica. The combination of lectures and activities in the natural environment make it a highly educational experience.

**Education First (EF)**

EF provides world-wide language courses with focus on educational travel and cultural exchange for over 50 years. Over 500 language schools and offices are located in 160 countries. EF supports research projects and forms key partnerships to contribute to new and innovative ways of learning. (EF Education First, 2017)

- Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic

During this eight-days trip students are immersed in a local community and in an environmental sustainability project, which makes this offer very interactive. Through to hands-on experience they are personally involved and will have a memorable experience. Particularly for that reason this project is worth a glimpse.

**La Montaña**

The leading language school 'La Montaña' is situated in the natural surroundings of Bariloche, Patagonia, Argentina, and offers tailor-made and small group Spanish classes. Standard courses but also special packages and group lessons are offered. (La Montaña, 2016)

- Nature and Spanish Course

This offer combines the learning of the Spanish language with the immersion in nature and therefore makes it an ideal comparison point.

**Mantis Environmental**

Mantis Environmental was created by an environmental entrepreneur in Montréal, Canada who recognized the need of sustainable solutions for all kinds of companies and organizations. Workshops, education programs, consultation as well as Eco adventures are offered. (Mantis Environmental, no date)

- Eco Adventure

This one to two-week program about Honduras biodiversity was created for students aged 15-19. Its focus is set on teaching in an experiential way, which makes it a unique experience for the participants. It is especially interesting to look at due to the high educational level of the offer, which is aimed to be achieved for the eco-language immersion as well.

The chosen offers were analysed according to various criteria and are presented in Appendix VIII.

**2.1. Best practice**

Through the precise analysis of the five offers, outstanding approaches as well as innovative and effective teaching techniques were identified, which are enhanced in the

following overview. This selection is based on the needs and interests of the elaborated target audience, as well as level of sustainability and (environmental-) learning.

- **Divide the program into various topics:** Costa Rica Hands on Learning

Horizontes Natural Tours Costa Rica divides its program into various topics. Customers can pick the ones they are interested in and combine them with activities of their choice. This makes it a customized experience. Also, it attracts a broader range of people due to different areas of interests. Due to the difficulty of the coordination of various topics as well as the aim of an amicable and personal atmosphere and thus attracting a smaller group of participants, this approach should be used in a different way. The division of eco-immersion into various sub-topics would bring momentum and the promotion of the program be more targeted.

- **Small group size:** Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica; Eco Adventure

A small group size allows to have a personalized and rather intimate experience. Thanks to that the group participants get to know each other very well, including the tour guide or organiser and thus have a more intense experience. Also, the learning effect is higher. However, to make it economically profitable, a minimum number of participants is required. The price breakdown needs to be worked out in detail so that there is at least full cost recovery, if not profit.

- **Group discussion rounds:** Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic

Short daily group sessions in the evening not only allow participants to share their experience but also helping them to revive each day and deepen, refresh or extend what they have learned. Furthermore, it gives the group leader or organiser valuable feedback with the opportunity to further adapt the immersion and thus make it even more customized for the group. As monitoring helps resolving problems and eliminating negative aspects of the trip, it leads to customer satisfaction and therefore to a sustainable form of tourism.

- **Preparation workshop: Eco Adventure**

Before participating in an Eco-Adventure a training program of at least three workshops is organised. The reason for that is to provide sufficient information about the country and its customs before starting the program. Also, the impact of the trip on the environment as well as local communities is communicated.

As a big part of the participants who will book the eco-language immersion will be current students of Spanish and Culture, preparation lessons could be implemented very well. Also, it is to be considered to expand this approach with a debriefing lesson and or workshop. This will have double effect and be crucial to make it a sustainable experience. On one hand, it provides valuable feedback which is helpful to make future adaptations to the program and on the other hand it helps participants to reflect and re-evaluate their experience, which will imprint it into their memories. As per chapter three this can increase environmental and social awareness as well as lead to increased responsibility and commitment.

- **Cooperation with local Universities and non-profit organisations:** Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic; Costa Rica Hands on Learning

The cooperation with local universities and non-profit organization works towards social and cultural sustainability through the enriching exchange between travellers and locals as well as working together towards a sustainable form of tourism. This particularly because direct contact to locals leads towards more commitment and responsibility and is beneficial both for the participant of the immersion as well as the involved local universities and organisations through international knowledge sharing.

- **Create packages for a dedicated group of people**: Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica; Eco Adventure

If the needs and requirements of a group are known beforehand, a tailor-made package based on the demographics and interests of the group can be developed. Time and money can be saved this way for several reasons: it is most certainly only a two-ways communication between the organiser and the main customer who then passes on the information to the participants, the design of the itinerary is easier because of a rather homogenous group of people and economies of scale can be achieved.

- **Environmental friendly accommodation:** Costa Rica Hands on Learning; Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica; Spanish and Nature

The choice of accommodation can make a significant impact on the overall experience. In the case of the eco-immersion developed in this study, it is important to only consider environmental friendly accommodation and where possible support the local communities. Eco-lodges as well as farms which operate in a sustainable way and are owned by locals ensure an authentic and long-lasting adventure. During the program Spanish and Nature in Argentina,

the language school *La Montaña* offers the option to stay at a local family and thus being fully immersed in the local culture, customs and language. It also guarantees cultural exchange and supports local families by financial contribution. Though the families need to be chosen carefully in order to prevent any trouble.

- **Option to customize the offer:** Costa Rica Hands on Learning

Horizontes Nature Tours Costa Rica not only allows the customer to choose the topics and activities of the experience but also to select between basic, medium and high standard of the accommodation which generates various price levels. Thus, several price levels are formed which provide a customized offer for all sorts of budgets.

- **Good mix between lectures, activities and experiential learning:** Costa Rica Hands on learning

To make an offer attractive, it is important to offer a good mix between fun activities, interesting inputs about the chosen topics as well as let the participants immerse in the natural habitat and thus provide experiential learning.

- **Hands-on project:** Environmental citizenship in the Dominican Republic

The overall interest to get to know the local way of living is becoming more and more important during a stay abroad. To create an experience which includes collaborative work with locals in the area of environmental sustainability or sustainable tourism development results in a long-lasting memory by the association of the place with the people they worked with and with whom they probably connected or established a friendship. To offer hands-on projects allows to achieve the highest level of a touristic experience, as personal involvement and participation induce deeper experiences which are memorable for a longer time.

- **Package:** Sustainable Tourism of Costa Rica; Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic

To provide a package which includes airfares, transportation, accommodation, local transport, meals, local support, travel insurance, lecture material and activities makes the organization of such a trip much easier for the participants and thus stands out from other offers. To make participants save time is a great asset and stands for high service quality.

- **Free choice of length of course:** Nature & Spanish Course

The option to choose the length of stay freely provides high flexibility to travellers as well as attracts people with a wide range of time limitation. There is two ways this approach could be used for the eco-language immersion. Either a post-tour could be put together and suggested to all registered participants / sign-ups. This post-tour would have a margin of 10-20% which would make it another way to increase revenue and profits. Otherwise a Spanish course of one to two weeks prior to the beginning of the eco-language immersion could be provided for all participants for a special price.

- **Field Director / full time tour director / local expert guides:** Environmental citizenship in the Dominican Republic

To have a full-time tour director makes participants feel looked after and safe during their stay. Also, it stands for a high level of service and makes a trip personalized and amicable. Moreover, the engagement with local expert guides makes it an authentic and more interesting experience. It is of great importance to support local experts to comply with sustainability standards. Field Directors are experts in their area and know the history and details behind. These are able to inspire the participants which gives more value to the experience and leads to a higher level of education.

- **Community leaders / Tourism Board**: Costa Rica Hands on learning

Talks of influential people result in greater understanding of the content and absorption of such. It makes an offer more attractive and competitive and adds more value to it. Making contacts with leading and influential people of the industry as well as maintaining personal and healthy relationships is important for building long-lasting cooperation and contributing to sustainability.

# 3. Identification of the destinations and right partners

In the following chapter, the choice of destinations and local partners is revealed and justified. To create and implement a sustainable touristic experience, all three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) will need to be considered as effectively as possible.

### 3.1. Destinations

The choice of the right destinations is very important to make it an outstanding experience, which reveals the general objective of the "eco-language immersion". The following criteria determined the choice:

- The focus was set on finding a good balance between touristic hotspots as well as remote and rather unknown destinations. This will make the experience outstanding from others.
- The travel time by bus between the destinations shouldn't be more than 3 hours, to spend as much quality time as possible at the different locations as well as to avoid long hours in the bus.
- The destinations need to be accessible by bus and have a basic touristic infrastructure to accommodate the group.
- A destination which offers rural community tourism and several natural reserves needs to be considered.
- As for each of the destinations a topic will be chosen, it is important that the destination is unique and provides the opportunity to cover the overall theme of the natural environment and sustainability.
- The locations should unveil the various climate zones and show the incredible biodiversity of the country.
- A good combination of locations which offer nature activities and locations with cultural activities would be ideal.
- The destinations are visible on internet, so that required information is easily found and contacts with local partners can be established.

  (S. Ulate Soto, Director of Spanish and Culture, personal communication, 3 September 2017)

To cover all the above elements as well as to offer a sustainable and authentic experience for customized for the target group, a 12-days itinerary is suggested, which can be found in Annex I. A triangle which contains all the destinations, was developed by the author, displayed in Figure 11.

*Figure 11: Triangle of Destinations*

Source: (Lonelyplanet, 2017)

In the following, the selected destinations will be briefly introduced and justified with three key arguments.

**Alajuela**

Alajuela is located in the Central Valley, only a 20km northwest of San José and is the second largest city of Costa Rica. The Juan Santamaria International Airport is only a few minutes' drive away. (Delfina Travel Group Inc., 2017)

- After a long journey, it serves ideally as destination for the first night due to its close distance to the Airport.
- Located in the Central Valley and surrounded by nature, it generates a great first impression of the country.
- Instead of starting the experience in San José, as many other tour operators do, it offers a point of difference to stay in an eco-lodge in Alajuela.

**Monteverde**

"Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve is the most famous cloud forest reserve in the world and one of the most important protected areas in Costa Rica." (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, no date) It is the place where back in the seventies researchers and biologists started to explore and examine the country's outstanding biodiversity and is known as the birthplace of ecotourism in Costa Rica. The Reserve contains six different ecological zones and is home to the famous Quetzal bird. (Monteverdeinfo, 2011)

- Monteverde has been one of the most renowned destinations for ecotourism in Costa Rica and is therefore a must-do during the eco-language immersion.
- As there is less than 1% of cloud forest world wide, it is a rare spot on planet earth and it offers a unique biological diversity which the participants are able to discover.
- The tourist infrastructure is well-established and there is a wide range of adventure and ecotourism activities provided, which makes it worth-wile staying for at least two days.

**El Castillo**

The rather small village of El Castillo offers a great alternative to the nearby touristy spot La Fortuna, where travellers from all over the world enjoy adventure and water activities as well as visit the Arenal Volcano National Parc. The Volcano Arenal is Costa Rica's most active volcano in Costa Rica and is surrounded by a conservation area which protects 16 reserves between the Tilarán and the Guanacaste mountain ranges. (Arenal.Net, 2015)

- Having mentioned, that the Volcano Arenal is one of the most active volcanos in Costa Rica, it is a destination which is highly sought after by nature lovers and geoscience enthusiasts.
- To visit El Castillo permits the participants to discover a village with familiar atmosphere yet close to the Arenal Volcano National Parc. This will provide the participants with a more authentic experience as well as demonstrate the great variety of the country. To also stay at rather unknown and remote destinations, which are located nearby a touristic hotspot, makes up a unique selling point for the product.
- Staying at El Castillo supports the local community and therefore overlaps well with the objectives of the eco-language immersion of a sustainable experience.

**Bijagua**

Bijagua is a small village located in Northern Costa Rica. It is a leader in rural community tourism, which started with an ecotourism pioneer project – the founding of Heliconias Lodge by ten local families. The village is located at the foot of Tenorio Volcano and serves as the entrance to its National Park, where the Río Celeste is located. With its turquoise-blue

waterfalls, lagoons and mud pools, it is a real hidden gem. The area is home to many special birds, tropical animals such as pumas, tapirs and rare plants. (Delfina Travel Group Inc., 2017; Lonelyplanet, 2017)

- As a remote and rather unfamiliar destination, set in a valley between two volcanos, Bijagua offers a real immersion in nature and is an adventure itself as a destination.
- Spotting the crystal-blue Río Celeste in the middle of the forest is a very deep and memorable experience which allows the participants to discover a natural wonder generated by chemical reaction of the Volcano.
- Staying in Bijagua permits the participants to get a deep insight into the lives of the local community and interact with them. Also, it generates financial resources for the community which are partly used for conservation purposes and is therefore a very sustainable form of travelling.

**La Tirimbina Biological Reserve**

Scientists and Researchers from all over the world visit La Tirimba Biological Reserve to study the biodiversity of the rainforest. Set in between forests and rivers La Tirimbina is a protected area of 345 hectares of forest as well as an an island.  and Various ecotourism activities and volunteer options are offered in this conservation area which make it a hotspot for environmental education. The conservation objectives include the conservation of the ecosystems as well as the promotion of ecotourism and the development of environmental education programs which make usage of the Reserve. (Tirimbina Biological Reserve, 2010)

- Famous amongst researchers and scientists but unknown amongst tourists, this biological reserve is a remote spot in the middle of nowhere and allows total immersion in nature for the participants.
- A visit to Tirimbina Biological Reserve allows the participants to connect with specialists and researchers in the field of conservation, sustainability and biology and will generate deeper understanding of the overall topics. This could raise awareness for the dire need of environmental protection and lead to sustainable actions in the future.
- Each visit of the Tirimbina Biological Reserve supports the conservation projects and research financially and is thus a sustainable form of travelling.

**Tortuguero**

Tortuguero National Park is located within the Tortuguero Conservation Area, which consists in land of 26,156 hectares of land and a marine section of 50,160 hectares and thus protects one of the largest remaining areas of tropical rainforest in Central America. The vegetation is predominantly tropical wet forest, offering an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna. The rivers, canals and lagoons are used as ways of transportation by residents as well as for tourists to navigate through the Conservation area and observe its lush flora and fauna. (Área de Conservación Tortuguero, 2012; Rainforest Adventures, 2017) Tortuguero, originates from the Spanish word "Tortuga" which means Turtle, which is the main attraction of the National Park. There is a high chance to see turtles the whole year around. However, the nesting seasons of the Leatherback turtles run from February to April and of the Giant Green Sea Turtle's and Hawksbill turtle's from June to October. (My Costa Rica, 2017)

- Visiting Tortuguero allows participants to discover a very isolated and remote destination on the Carribean Coast. Being able to access Tortugero only by boat already makes this a truly memorable adventure.
- As the Tortugero Conservation area is home to very exotic and rare species, participants have the opportunity to witness long-term conservation efforts.
- Visiting the protected area of Tortugero is supports the community of Tortugero and allows them to futher develop their conservation projects and thus forms a sustainable way of travelling.

**San José**

San José is the capital of Costa Rica, located in the Central Valley and serves as a hub for international travellers with the Airport only a 20 minutes' drive away and its many bus companies providing connections to the rest of the country. The metropolis offers extensive accommodation options, parks, a wide range of museums and cultural activities as well as numerous restaurants and a lively nightlife. (Delfina Travel Group Inc., 2017)

- San José is the perfect destination to finalize the eco-language immersion, due to its proximity to the Airport.

- After having visited uniquely villages and rather remote destinations, it is of great importance to introduce the participants to the capital of the country, which allows them to witness cultural heritage amongst skyscrapers and antique colonial buildings and thus brings the cultural angle to the experience.
- The last evening is of great importance for the overall impression of the country. As San José offers a wide range of high quality Costa Rican food and bars with local flair, the city provides great options to enjoy the last evening as a group and to further establish the connection which the group certainly would have built during the prior days.

### 3.2. Local Partners

The following part will introduce the reader to the selected local partners for the promotion of the experience as well as the collaboration in the chosen destinations. Firstly, the criteria for the selection will be outlined. Secondly, the selection of partners will be presented and justified.

#### 3.2.1. Criteria

The criteria to select the right partners emerged from various angles. The theoretical part of this research paper served as a basis. Furthermore, it was very important to focus on the general objectives of the eco-language immersion, which were partly given by the manager of Spanish & Culture as well as partly developed by the author. Also, interviews with local experts in the field helped to gain a wider understanding about the communication and collaboration with local partners. With reference to chapter 4.6.2., the tourism chain and related product items, all stages of an experience have very particular characteristics. Therefore, the criteria needed to be adapted accordingly.

The following criteria were elaborated with reference to the tourism chain shown in Table 10 in chapter 4.6.2. Only the stages, which are considered to be relevant for the eco-language immersion were selected by the author.

*Table 3: Criteria of Evaluation*

| Stage | Client's activity | Means (product items) | Provider | Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Preparation | Generating interest | Marketing , information, advert | Spanish & Culture | inapplicable |
| | Product check-out and reservation | Marketing, advert, information and communication channels | Spanish & Culture; DMOs; tour operators | - Sustainability<br>- Authenticity<br>- Target audience represented |
| 2. Journey | Transport from home to Costa Rica and from one destination to the next one | Plane, bus | Airlines and local transport companies | - Sustainability<br>- Comfort<br>- Conformity with values and objectives |
| 3. Stay | Accommodation | Hotels, Eco-lodges | Facilities | - Location<br>- Facilities<br>- Sustainability<br>- Price/Performance ratio |
| | Meals | Restaurants, own preparation | Facilities | - Local (community) involvement<br>- Authenticity<br>- Organic and local<br>- Healthy |
| | Learning activities | Spanish language learning | Teachers; tour-guides; local experts; managers of facilities and territories | - In-depth learning<br>- Experiential learning<br>- Intensity of learning<br>- Local (community) involvement<br>- Sustainability<br>- Point of difference |
| | Nature/adventure activities | Visiting protected territories; horse-back riding etc. | Tour-guides, managers of territories; operators | - Environmental learning<br>- Intensity of learning<br>- Immersion in nature<br>- Local (community) involvement<br>- Hands-on learning<br>- Safety and Accessibility<br>- Sustainability<br>- Point of difference |
| | Shopping and local service | Purchase of souvenirs and local products | Craftsmen, producers and sellers of souvenirs and local products; Shops | - Local (community) involvement<br>- Sustainability |
| 4. Journey back home | Transport from Costa Rica home | Plane | Airlines | see Nr. 2 |
| 5. Activities after | Recording and sharing of memories | Taking photographs, writing articles or web- | Providers of information and communication | - Sustainability<br>- Easy way of sharing<br>- Modern |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| returning home | | pages, participating in discussion or meetings | technologies, operators of facilities | - Innovative<br>- Point of difference |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

### 3.2.2 Justified Selection

The following abstract will point out the choice of local partners for the eco-language experience which will be justified through the evaluation of the above criteria. The evaluation was made by allocating a number of points between 1-10 (1 to be the lowest and 10 the highest), based on the information provided on the website as well as personal experience on site in 2014 by the author and in 2017 by the manager of Spanish & Culture. Only partners with a minimum of 80 % match will be chosen for the experience.

**Stage 1: Product check-out and reservation**

In order to promote the experience in an effective and sustainable way, it is important to collaborate with local partners which are well-established in the market and have experience in the promotion of tourism products.

*Table 5: Product check-out and reservation*

| Stage | Client's activity | Selection of Partners | Criteria | Evaluation in Points (1-10) | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Product check-out and reservation | Spanish & Language | - Sustainability<br>- Authenticity<br>- Target audience reach<br>**TOTAL** | 7<br>8<br>10<br>**25/30** | Green Marketing; long-term objectives; local employees<br>Existing students know the manager, small market presence<br>Target audience easily reachable through existing personal connection to students |
| 1. | Product check-out and reservation | Costa Rica DMC | - Sustainability<br>- Authenticity<br>- Target audience reach<br>**TOTAL** | 7<br>9<br>9<br>**25/30** | Company value: environmentally sustainable recognition and opportunities to 'green up'<br>Well established in the market, award-winning, most experienced DMO in Costa Rica, local knowledge<br>International promotions, high reach through online marketing actions and during international fares |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Product check-out and reservation | COOPRENA R.L. | - Sustainability<br><br>- Authenticity<br><br>- Target audience reach<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br><br>9<br><br>8<br><br>**27/30** | Highest level of Certification for sustainable tourism (Level 5)<br><br>Promoted and supported by the ICT; rural community tourism<br><br>Very specific target audience with disadvantage of being too narrow |
| 1. | Product check-out and reservation | Actuar | - Sustainability<br><br>- Authenticity<br><br>- Target audience reach<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br><br>10<br><br>8<br><br>**28/30** | Highest level of Certification for sustainable tourism (Level 5), alternative and rural community tourism<br><br>Design and offer authentic experiences, well established in the market; promoted and supported by the ICT, alternative and rural community tourism<br><br>Very specific target audience with disadvantage of being too narrow |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

**Justified Selection:**

All four partners reached a sufficient number of points and would therefore work well for the promotion of the eco-language immersion. Besides promoting the experience through the own company, it is recommended to collaborate with at least two other partners. This will allow to reach the target audience more effectively as well as efficiently. As per personal communication of Karianne de Rave, Product Manager of COOPRENA R.L. a cooperation would be possible particularly for the promotion of the product on various of their channels as well as the representation during meetings (Appendix IV, p. 6). Both COOPRENA R.L. and Actuar are certified with the highest level of Certification for sustainable tourism by the CST and would therefore match very well with the project objectives.

**Stage 2: Journey**

Three different local transport companies were recommended by Karianne de Rave, Product Manager of COOPRENA R.L. (personal communication, 24 October 2017) and evaluated by the author below. The evaluation of Sustainability is based on the achievement of Certificates of Sustainability and environmental practices. Also, it was considered whether it is owned and managed by Costa Ricans and their employees are locals. It is important that the group of travellers is comfortable during the whole journey. Air-conditioning as well as modern and safe vehicles are necessary. The conformity with the requirements reveals the service options and the capacity of the vehicles.

As the transport to Costa Rica and back home highly depends on the country of origin and seasonality, it won't be included in the package but as an additional option. To make it a sustainable experience from the beginning to the end, it would be recommended to get around using the airplane as a travel method. However, since most participants will be arriving from North America and Europe, the airplane will be very hard to avoid. CO2 compensation is a possibility to contribute to sustainability and offset the carbon footprint and nowadays offered by most of the airlines.

*Table 6: Journey*

| Stage | Client's activity | Selection of Partners | Criteria | Evaluation in Points (1-10) | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. | Transport from home to Costa Rica | | | *Depending on origin* | |
| 2. | Local Transport | Mapache | - Sustainability | 10 | Highest Level of Sustainability (Level 5); Carbon Neutral; UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism; Agreement for the Protection of Children and Adolescents from Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism in Costa Rica |
| | | | - Comfort | 9 | Very modern vehicles, Air conditioning |
| | | | - Conformity with requirements | 7 | Option to rent; vehicles for max. 10 Pax |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **26/30** | |
| | Local Transport | Tico Ride | - Sustainability | 1 | No certification; no information on Sustainability |
| | | | - Comfort | 10 | Air conditioning; as many stops as required; modern |
| | | | - Conformity with requirements | 10 | Private transport service with driver; capacity of 14 Pax |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **20/30** | |
| | Local Transport | Senderos Verdes | - Sustainability | 8 | 100% Costarican; Member of "Green Path" Design and offer authentic experiences, well established in the market; promoted and supported by the ICT, alternative and rural community tourism |
| | | | - Comfort | 9 | Modern vehicles, air conditioning |
| | | | - Conformity with | 10 | Private transport service with driver; big capacity possible |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | requirements<br>**TOTAL** | **27/30** | |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

**Justified Selection:**

There are several options to drive the group from one location to the next one. In order to make transportation smooth, efficient and use sustainable practices, it is recommended to work with only one transport company which will either drive the group during the whole time of the experience or rent a vehicle and hire a driver or guide for the time. As per Table 5 above, both Mapache and Senderos Verdes are highly committed to sustainability and would therefore comply with our values and objectives. As Senderos Verdes offer private transport including driver, it is chosen for the eco-language immersion. Even though Tico Ride shows high conformity with our requirements and offers high capacity vehicles, it is inadvisable to work with them, as there is no evidence of sustainable practices.

**Stage 3: Stay**

- **Accommodation**

The accommodation options below were found and evaluated by the author. For some destinations, the section "Hotels" of the Certification for Sustainable Tourism website was used as support. Three criteria were chosen in order to make sure the options found corresponded to the objectives and requirements for the eco-language immersion. Karianne de Rave, named security and accessibility as an important factor for choosing a location. With regards to sustainability, the interaction with locals, actions to preserve the heritage / patrimonial as well as certifications and programs were mentioned. (Appendix IV, p. 4) Furthermore, the immersion in nature and the locations' uniqueness were taken into consideration. To keep the costs for the experience at an affordable level for middle class people, it is important to choose accommodation which provides a certain standard and service for a good price. The criteria price/performance will evaluate the price for the respective offer.

*Table 7: Accomodation*

| Stage | Client's activity | Selection of Partners | Criteria | Evaluation in Points (1-10) | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. | Accommodation | Tacacori Eco-Lodge | - Location | 10 | 15min drive from the Airport; located in lush tropical garden |
| | | | - Facilities | 8 | 4 Villas with two beds or one Queen-size bed; big tropical garden with great variety of birds; Terrace with tables and chairs; mini gift shop with local souvenirs |
| | | | - Sustainability | 8 | Built with minimum impact on nature; biodegradable amenities; process of installing solar energy; recycling; local employees; working towards CST |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 6 | USD 97-123 (including continental breakfast and wi-fi) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **33/40** | |
| 3. | Accommodation | Albergue La Casona | - Location | 10 | Unique and only lodging establishment inside Monteverde Reserve |
| | | | - Facilities | 8 | Room capacity for 43 Pax; Restaurant; Gift Shop |
| | | | - Sustainability | 8 | Level 3 of CST |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 9 | USD 81 (including three meals and entrance to the reserve) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **37/40** | |
| | Accommodation | Rancho Margot Eco Lodge | - Location | 9 | "Off the grid Paradize", closeness to Arenal Volcano, surrounded by nature |
| | | | - Facilities | 10 | Library; natural pools; restaurant; bar; garden; lounge; yoga studio; soccer field; big capacity of different rooms |
| | | | - Sustainability | 10 | One of the most advanced and sustainable ecotourism projects in all of Costa Rica; Level 10 CST |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 10 | Bunkhouse experience: USD 80 (includes three buffet meals, guided ranch tour and cow milking) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **39/40** | |
| | Accommodation | Heliconias Rainforest Lodge | - Location | 9 | Spectacular views of Miravalles Volcano and Lake Nicaragua; owns a private rainforest reserve of 70 hectars; 10min drive to Bijagua |
| | | | - Facilities | 8 | 6 rooms and 4 private cottages; restaurant; bar; conference center; |
| | | | - Sustainability | 9 | Pioneer Project in ecotourism development in the |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Northern Region of Costa Rica; managed and maintained by 10 local feisty families; process of CST |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 8 | aprox. 65 USD (including continental breakfast, wi-fi) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **34/40** | |
| | Accommodation | Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge | - Location | 9 | Private Wildlife Refuge protecting 345 hectares of mid-elevation forest and 9 kilometres of trails pass through several ecosystems of the forest and river |
| | | | - Facilities | 9 | 6 Deluxe Rooms; 12 Standard Rooms, 11 Student Quarters; conference room; restaurant; souvenir shop; laundry service |
| | | | - Sustainability | 9 | Non-profit organization created to conserve the rainforest and to provide environmental education and scientific research; Level 4 CST |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 7 | Standard Single Room: USD 79 (including breakfast, taxes, entry to biological reserve) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **34/40** | |
| | Accommodation | Lirio Lodge | - Location | 10 | Located on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, in the south of Tortuguero national park, on the lakeside of the Madre de Di-os lagoon |
| | | | - Facilities | 9 | 10 guest rooms with capacity up to 4 Pax (eco-bungalows and eco-tents); restaurant on the water; fireplace; hammock rancho; canoes |
| | | | - Sustainability | 7 | Solar panels, environmental friendly rooms/tents; plans for steady, ecologically friendly and sustainable growth; educational tourism programs with local community |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 8 | USD 259 (Single room; including all meals, guide, 2 tours and boat transportation) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **34/40** | |
| | Accommodation | Aranjuez Eco Hotel | - Location | 9 | Walking distance to the city centre |
| | | | - Facilities | 8 | 35 rooms; restaurant |
| | | | - Sustainability | 7 | Complex of 5 authentic Costa Rican houses from the 30's preserved as patrimony; solar panels and water saving etc.; Certification Eco Leader on Trip Advisor |
| | | | - Price/Performance ratio | 9 | USD 52 (Standard Room; including continental breakfast buffet) |
| | | | **TOTAL** | **33/40** | |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

**Justified Selection:**

The accommodation options below were found and evaluated by the author. For some destinations, the section "Hotels" of the Certification for Sustainable Tourism website was used as support. Three criteria were chosen in order to make sure the options found corresponded to the objectives and requirements for the eco-language immersion. Karianne de Rave, named security and accessibility as an important factor for choosing a location. With regards to sustainability, the interaction with locals, actions to preserve the heritage / patrimonial as well as certifications and programs were mentioned. (Appendix IV, p. 4) Furthermore, the immersion in nature and the locations' uniqueness were taken into consideration. To keep the costs for the experience at an affordable level for middle class people, it is important to choose accommodation which provides a certain standard and service for a good price. The criteria price/performance will evaluate the price for the respective offer.

- **Meals**

For the targeted audience, health is an important factor in daily life. To stand out from other experiences as well as to customize this experience fully, healthy, seasonal, local and where possible organic food will be provided. Most of the meals will be taken at the restaurant of the lodges and hotels. Twice picnic lunch will be provided during the transport, which will be made freshly in the morning in the lodges with local, seasonal and organic ingredients. Refreshments and small snacks such as seasonal fruits, nuts, banana chips, fruit cake amongst others will always be provided during morning and afternoon tea. In order to generate less waste by distributing plastic water bottles as well as for promotion purposes, a sustainable water bottle with the logo of Spanish and Culture will be provided in the beginning of the experience which can be refilled at any time and reused back home. The three restaurants below were chosen to fill up lunches which can't be taken at the place of accommodation as well as for a coffee stop in between a longer journey. The selection was based on the location of the restaurant, preferably in an interesting spot in between two destinations as well as the menu, given priority to traditional Costa Rican food. Also, sustainability and online rating on Trip Advisor or Google, depending on availability, were taken into consideration.

*Table 8: Meals*

| Stage | Client's activity | Selection of Partners | Criteria | Evaluation in Points .(1-10) | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. | Coffee Stop | Mimi Restaurant | - Location<br>- Online Rating<br>- Menu<br>- Sustainability<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br>8<br>8<br>6<br>**32/40** | Located in the centre Cañas; a typical Latin American town, at half of the way to the destination<br>Rating 4/5 on Google<br>Typical Costa Rican dishes, local food<br>Local food and employees |
| 3. | Meals | Hummingbird Café | - Location<br>- Online Rating<br>- Menu<br>- Sustainability<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br>9<br>10<br>9<br>**38/40** | Located on a farm in Bijagua<br>Rating 4.5/5 on Trip Advisor<br>Healthy; fresh and organic ingredients from the farm; traditional Costa Rican Food and Salads<br>Locally owned family (farm) restaurant; organic |
| 3. | Meals | Nuestra Tierra | - Location<br>- Online Rating<br>- Menu<br>- Sustainability<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br>8<br>8<br>6<br>**32/40** | Behind de National Museum of Costa Rica; in the city centre; great location to conclude the guided tour<br>Rating 4.1/5 on Trip Advisor<br>Typical Costa Rican food<br>Local food and employees |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

**Justified Selection:**

A mix of restaurants which offer seasonal and organic food as well as traditional, typical Costa Rican food were chosen for the eco-language immersion. This will bring authenticity as well provide a cultural experience.

- **Activities**

The activities during the eco-language immersion are divided into learning activities as well as nature and adventure activities. It is most likely, that the nature and adventure activities will have an additional learning effect and make the whole package very experiential and diverse. Most of the activities are provided through the eco-lodges and hotels. The partners for the chosen activities will be justified through the evaluation based on the following criteria:

Immersion in nature, hands-on learning, intensity of learning, sustainability, uniqueness/fun factor.

*Table 9: Activities*

| Stage | Client's activity | Selection of Partners | Criteria | Evaluation in Points (1-10) | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. | Learning activity: Interactive Spanish learning | Spanish and Culture | - Hands-on learning | 10 | Interactive, applying of the vocabulary during daily activities |
| | | | - Intensity of learning | 10 | Adapting lessons to the students' needs; immersed in Spanish speaking country; learning in nature |
| | | | - Sustainability | 9 | Local Costa Rican Spanish teacher; phone application for vocabulary learning; saving paper; ongoing Spanish classes |
| | | | - Uniqueness / Fun<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br>**39/40** | Themed lessons; workshops; nature as classroom |
| 3. | Learning activity: Coffee/ Chocolate / Sugar Cane guided tour | Don Juan Tours | - Immersion in nature | 9 | Farm experience in Monteverde |
| | | | - Hands-on learning | 10 | Educational and cultural tour |
| | | | - Intensity of learning | 10 | 5 Senses, history, importance in socio economic development and all relevant steps outlined |
| | | | - Sustainability | 9 | Organic coffee, Level 3 of CST, Bandera Azúl Ecológico, Agreement for the Protection of Children and Adolescents from Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism in Costa Rica |
| | | | - Uniqueness / Fun<br>**TOTAL** | 9<br>**47/50** | Fun activity which involves the participants |
| 3. | Nature activity: Plant a tree to set off carbon emissions | Youth Cooperative COOPEJUBI | - Immersion in nature | 10 | Immersed in nature |
| | | | - Hands-on learning | 10 | Planting a tree by themselves |
| | | | - Intensity of learning | 10 | Personal involvement = memorable experience |
| | | | - Sustainability | 10 | Engaging and promoting carbon neutral tourism and educational and environmental activities; set off carbon footprint; work with local community |
| | | | - Uniqueness / Fun<br>**TOTAL** | 10<br>**50/50** | Unique way to make the eco-immersion sustainable |
| 3. | Nature/adventure activity: Horseback riding to Río Celeste | Bijagua Rainforest Tours | - Immersion in nature | 10 | Authentic natural experience |
| | | | - Sustainability | 8 | Supporting local green communities' projects; rural sustainable tourism |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | - Uniqueness / Fun<br><br>**TOTAL** | 9<br><br>**27/30** | Río Celeste = unique, remote spot which isn't very touristy; horseback riding as a fun activity |

Source: Own illustration with reference to Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2004

**Justified Selection:**

The selected partners provide sustainable experiences with high learning intensity through hands-on activities. This leads to a much deeper understanding of the selected themes as well as to positive memories and could therefore empower to take further action in environmental protection or social corporate responsibility. All other activities will be organized and implemented by the eco-lodges and hotels which have local naturalist guides

- **Shopping and local service**

Several of the above partners offer souvenirs There will be various options for the participants to shop for souvenirs and local specialties. They will be informed right at the beginning about local and sustainable products.

# Third Part

This part consists in the outline of the created prototype for the eco-language immersion. The proposed schedule will be explained as well as the implementation of the product in the touristic market clarified.

## 1. Eco-language immersion Prototype

The prototype for the eco-language immersion consists in a 12-days itinerary during which a small group of travellers are going to practice their Spanish skills and learn about the natural environment and culture of Costa Rica. A complete immersion in nature as well as in the local customs, will allow to deepen the experience of the participants. Furthermore, a very practical and interactive way of teaching the Spanish language will ensure fast progress as well as a motivational and fun way of learning. In each destination, the group will be working on another topic. There will be two hours of Spanish class each day, followed by the practice of the new vocabulary through guided nature tours and activities. Mostly, the Spanish classes will be held in the morning, so that the group is equipped with the necessary knowledge around the topic and the vocabulary to further deepen it throughout the day. There will be several discussion rounds to reveal the learnt together as a group as well as give valuable feedback. Thus, constant adaptations can be made to make the trip fully tailor-made to the groups' needs.

The chosen itinerary is customized for the target audience of 65 years+ and an intermediate to advanced Spanish level. The recommended group size for the experience is set to a minimum of eight and a maximum of twelve participants. This will allow a personal and familiar experience and at the same financial benefits for Spanish and Culture by receiving group tariffs amongst others.

A pre-workshop will take place online before the eco-language immersion. This workshop includes valuable information about the overall topic of the experience, the culture and local customs and general practical information such as health and safety. There will be an invitation via email to all participants which will include a link to the online workshop. At the end of the workshop there will be a form to fill out by each of the participants which will

include their first name, country of origin, interests and the reason for going on an eco-language immersion. Also, they can upload their photograph on a voluntary basis.

A simple application for smartphone devices will be created, as an answer to the growing trend of using new technology also in tourism. It will feature the following options:

- Detailed itinerary with all necessary information
    - Thus, it doesn't need to be printed out and paper can be saved
- A List of all participants with their first names, country of origin, interests and reason for going on the eco-language immersion
    - Once the trip is over, they will be able to have access to the contact details of all participants (subject to individual approval) and therefore allow them to stay in touch with each other
- Vocabulary games
    - For each topic, there will be Vocabulary games which can be played by the participants during their free time and/or on bus trips
    - This will add value to the experience and make the learn effect bigger
- Rating
    - There will be a rating option on each day of the itinerary giving 1-5 stars for each of the activities and Spanish classes

A professional naturalist tour director will join the group throughout the whole trip, by whom the group will be welcomed at the Airport and who will be the point of contact for any questions. The guide should be equipped with an emergency kit as well as first aid know-how.

To make the eco-language immersion stand out from other offers as well as to stick with sustainability, the provided meals will all be prepared with healthy, seasonal and where possible organic ingredients. The cooperating restaurants will need to be advised beforehand.

It is advisable to split bus trips into two parts with a short break of about 15 minutes in between. This allows the participants to stretch out their legs as well as use the bathroom. Also, refreshments should be provided to them during the journey.

To make it a more sustainable experience, two different post-trips will be offered for an additional cost to the participants. The first one will be an itinerary to discover further places

on the Pacific coast and inland. The second one will be a volunteer project in a rural community for a minimum of two weeks, in collaboration with COOPRENA R.L. A post-trip will be beneficial in various aspects: Firstly, the economic benefit is higher for Costa Rica and its local communities. Secondly, the social impact is bigger by encouraging interaction with locals after having learned about their customs as well as after having the necessary vocabulary to interact with them in a positive way. And thirdly, a post-trip allows the participants to discover more of the country without the need of travelling back and forth by airplane and is therefore more sustainable.

The proposed itinerary for the eco-language immersion can be found in Appendix VII.

## 2. Steps of realization

After creating a bespoke itinerary for the eco-language immersion, it is of great importance, to know about the various steps to successfully implement the experience in the touristic market of Costa Rica as well as to promote it efficiently to our target audience. By means of qualitative interviews with experts in the area, overlaying with the theory in the first part of the study, the following guidelines were established.

Before promoting a product to future customers, it needs to be verified and well-known (Karianne de Rave, Product Development Manager, personal communication, 11 October 2017). Site inspections of accommodations and familiarization trips to the destinations are essential. This also allows to previously establish contact with the suppliers and exchange information. Furthermore, the objectives of the eco-language immersion can be shared with them, enabling them to adapt and customize their services. Also, a long-term vision needs to be elaborated prior to the promotion and realization of the first eco-language immersion, in order to comply with the sustainability goals (Vivienne Solis Rivera, Biologist, personal communication, 24 October 2017).

Secondly, it is recommended to build up relationships with local partners which have worked with local communities and indigenous people for years and can thus help establish personal contact with them (Mildred Acuña Sosso, Head of Tourism Entrepreneurship Chair at UNED, personal communication, 21 October 2017). Both COOPRENA R.L and ACTUAR would

be reasonable and experienced partners in this field. The contact with COOPRENA R.L which has already been established during the writing of this study and the opportunity of a collaboration for the eco-language immersion was declared (Karianne de Rave, Product Development Manager, personal communication, 11 October 2017). Vivienne Solis Rivera puts emphasis on the knowledge about the traditions and customs of local communities which will enable to develop respect towards them. Also, being aware of their rules permits to interact with them in a positive way which is suitable for development and building long-lasting relationships. Both the participants as well as the local community should be informed sufficiently about the goals of the eco-language immersion as well as the one other. Thus, prior instructions offer a good opportunity to overcome the challenges of different customs and traditions and to build respect for each other. (Vivienne Solis Rivera, Biologist, personal communication, 24 October 2017) To be able to interact with the local community, an intermediate to advanced Spanish level is recommendable (Karianne de Rave, Product Development Manager, personal communication, 11 October 2017).

Before implementing a sustainable touristic experience, it is important to be conscious about the importance of respecting the environment and the local customs. This should then be demonstrated to the participants of the eco-language immersion. Alberto López, General Manager of the ICT enhances the high significance to implement the Certification in Sustainability (personal communication, 11 October 2017). Mildred Acuña Sosso sees the biggest benefit of the Certification in the international plausibility of the experience (personal communication, 21 October 2017). However, the implementation of such Certificates wouldn't make any positive change unless the real necessities and capacities of local communities were analysed and considered for the effective implementation of such Certificates, so Vivienne Solis Rivera from Coopesolidar. She also enhances the necessity of ongoing monitoring in that regard. (personal communication, 24 October 2017)

Before starting with the implementation process of the Certificate in Sustainability, Alberto López names four conditions which need to be considered:

- There needs to be declared intention of everyone to implement the Certificate
- Everyone needs to be committed to it
- Monitoring and evaluation serves for consistence and coherence

- The overall goals of the Certification should be implemented as part of the general philosophy

The following steps need to be followed to acquire the Certificate of Sustainability:

- Register interest
- Administrative consultation
- Verification process to see if there is compliance with all conditions
- Meeting / Reunion during which different questions will be asked
- There is a 6 months' timeframe during which the company can put itself in agreement with the ICT as well as during which a site assessment will be realized

(Alberto López, General Manager of ICT, personal communication, 11 October 2017)

Lastly, to bring the product to the market, effective and efficient promotion on various channels is recommended. Also, it is of great importance to promote sustainably and therefore ensure a minimal use of paper (Flyers, Posters etc.) or if so, only organic and recyclable material. The following channels were mentioned by the experts to promote the eco-language experience:

- Public websites as well as websites of institutions
- Educational centres
- Blogs
- Television programs
- Tradeshows for sustainable tourism
- National and international conferences
- Word of mouth

(Mildred Acuña Sosso, Head of the Tourism Entrepreneurship Chair at UNED, personal communication, 21 October 2017; Alberto López, General Manager of ICT, personal communication, 11 October 2017).

## Conclusion

Previous findings have showed, that both ecotourism and educational tourism are growing market segments in Costa Rica. Merging ecotourism and educational tourism has significant benefits on a wide scale. Through a deep immersion in nature and familiarization with environmental issues participants build strong awareness about the topic which can lead to more sustainable actions and the will to get involved in environmental conservation. Furthermore, studies showed that experiential learning in nature is more effective and will stay much longer in memory. On the other hand, locals benefit not only financially from the visitors but also socially. If there is a positive interaction between the tourists and the local community, both learn from each other about their respective culture, customs and different lifestyle which broadens their horizon. Thus, locals are able to augment their knowledge about different styles of tourists and adapt their offers accordingly, which leads to higher satisfaction in future and thus towards sustainable tourism development.

The eco-language immersion provides an experiential learning of the Spanish language whilst being fully immersed in nature and targets an audience which has been expanding steadily. Similar offers in Latin America mostly focus on students and recent graduates and generally either concentrate more on the environmental *or* educational aspect. Also, by including the angle of sustainability, the developed experience differentiates itself from other offers in the tourism market in Costa Rica and surrounding countries.

In order to implement the experience with success, it is recommendable to previously organise a site inspection of all eco-lodges and hotels which were selected in this study. Thereby personal contact with the owner can be established, the program and its goals can be introduced to them as well as the requirements can be discussed. This will contribute to sustainability through building positive, long-term relationship with the suppliers. Also, the more the partners are familiar with the project objectives and values, the higher the satisfaction of participants. Finally, it is advisable to consider the application for the Certificate in Sustainability, as this is another way to set its service apart from the competition.

This paper is the starting point for the implementation of a new touristic experience in Costa Rica. The development of a marketing strategy could be the subject of future academic papers, proposing a detailed action plan and creating an effective communication-mix.

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# Appendix I: Interview with Silvia Ulate Soto

**Fecha:** 3 de Septiembre 2017
**Medio:** Skype
**Name:** Silvia Ulate Soto
**Compañía:** Spanish and Culture online
**Ocupación:** Fundadora y directora

**1. 'Spanish and Culture online'**

**a) Podría hablar un poco sobre los antecedentes y la evolución de su compañía 'spanish and culture online'?**

Spanish and culture online nace de la idea de ofrecer a personas en el mundo la posibilidad de aprender el idioma español, así como la cultura costarricense pero no tienen la disponibilidad de tiempo para asistir de manera presencial a una Academia de Lengua.

**I. Cuales son las características demográficas y geográficas de sus estudiantes?**

Los estudiantes que se interesan por tomar lecciones con Spanish and culture son de origen Canadiense, pertenecientes a las provincias de Montreal, Quebec, Ontario, Calgary, Regina, British Colombia y Toronto. También dentro de los Estados Unidos hay estudiantes que pertenecen a los estados de Florida, California, (San Diego, Lonch Beach) , y Virginia. Dentro del continente Europeo, hay estudiantes de países como Alemania, Suiza, Holanda , Inglaterra y Bélgica.

**II. Cúal es el nivél promedio de español de sus estudiantes?**

La mayoría de mis estudiantes tienen un nivel de español intermedio-avanzado. En este aspecto, puedo decir que su nivel de gramática es más alto que su nivel de conversación.

**III. Cómo se diferencia su escuela de lengua con otras?**

El objetivo principal de la escuela Spanish and culture es satisfacer de manera personalizada y por supuesto eficiente las necesidades individuales de cada estudiante en relación a su aprendizaje de español. De ahí que, el programa de nuestra escuela **sea flexible, dinámico y muy interactivo**. A través del proceso de aprendizaje, el estudiante tiene la posibilidad de avanzar de acuerdo a su capacidad individual, con las estrategias propias, así como las actividades necesarias para que cada estudiante logre su propio objetivo de enseñanza. Desde el primer día de clase , el estudiante entra en un ambiente de comodidad y compromiso de parte de la escuela para lograr de manera conjunta el objetivo de aprender el idioma, así como la cultura de Costa Rica.

**b) Me podría describir los objetivos generales del desarollo de negocios?**

El objetivo general del negocio es desarrollar un programa de inmersión que se **llamará eco-language.** Dicho programa será enlazado con el programa actual de lecciones vía skype. Esto significa que los estudiantes iniciarán **su primer proceso** de aprendizaje, por medio de las clases vía skype, donde empezarán a conocer más del idioma, así como de la cultura costarricense. Posteriormente a eso se les invitará a tomar **el segundo paso**, el cual consistirá en la visita al país de Costa Rica para a través de

un programa organizado de inmersión que contendrá la visita a diferentes parques naturales, volcanes, playas, sitios rurales, contacto con nativos, podrán ampliar más su aprendizaje. Es importante destacar que en esta inmersión solamente se hablará en español , los guías, profesores, choferes, etc, tendrán solamente conversaciones en español con cada estudiante. Será una experiencia vivencial donde cada estudiante tendrá las condiciones necesarias y oportunas para mejorar su nivel de español.

**c) Por qué en su opinión una inmersión "eco-lenguaje" sostenible para grupos de viajeros podría ser algo exitoso y benefisioso?**

En mi opinión personal no existe mejor forma de aprender un idioma que tener la experiencia de vivir o viajar al país donde se habla el idioma que se está aprendiendo, añadido a esta idea el programa eco-language, hace un enlace con uno de los ambientes más idóneos para un aprendizaje, el cual es el ambiente natural. La naturaleza nos proporciona motivación, inspiración y las condiciones óptimas para aprender de una manera más eficiente. El ser humano fue creado para vivir en armonía con la naturaleza y esta es una de las razones por las cuales, es el medio óptimo para estudiar un idioma.

**2. Eco-turismo en Costa Rica**

**a) Qué importancia atribuye al eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

En Costa Rica, desde hace algunas décadas el tema del eco-turismo ha sido de gran importancia para el país. Cada vez se hace más relevante la necesidad de la conservación del medio ambiente, por eso el país a través de su ICT, incentiva a las compañías dedicadas al turismo a desarrollar sus actividades en armonía con el medio ambiente.

**b) En su opinión, qué tan sostenible es el eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

En mi opinión creo que poco a poco se ha ido progresando con la idea del eco-turismo en Costa Rica. Cada vez más compañías se están uniendo a esta modalidad de turismo, sin embargo, personalmente, pienso que aún falta más trabajo por desarrollar; como abrir más espacios a la población que trabaja en esta área para que sean educados en este tema con mayor profundidad, y se pueda crear más conciencia de la urgencia de trabajar en conjunto para maximizar los objetivos de conservación del ambiente.

**I. Cómo podrían ser involucrados los indígenas y las comunidades locales en todos los procesos de la creación e implementación de un tal proyecto?**

La población indígena también se está involucrando a paso lento a este trabajo conjunto, a través de la iniciativa de algunas compañías de incluir el turismo rural a sus ofertas. Tengo conocimiento de algunas agencias de turismo en Costa Rica que ofrecen a los visitantes la posibilidad de visitar reservas indígenas y de esta manera poder conocer acerca de sus orígenes, costumbres y tradiciones, etc. De esta manera el visitante extranjero puede tener un conocimiento más vivencial de las raíces y orígenes de la cultura costarricense. Actualmente en Costa Rica hay organizaciones gubernamentales y no gubernamentales que han dado un empuje importante a estos grupos étnicos para que sean tomados más en cuenta en diferentes áreas económicas y sociales en nuestro país. Hoy en día la población indígena tiene más accesos a la educación, salud, etc. Este hecho ha resultado en un mayor y mejor reconocimiento para dicha población dentro del ámbito nacional.

# Appendix II: 2nd Interview with Silvia Ulate Soto

**Fecha:** 18 de Octubre 2017
**Medio:** Skype
**Nombre:** Silvia Ulate Soto
**Organismo**: Spanish and Culture
**Ocupación:** Founder and Manager

**1. Cuál es el objetivo principal de eco-language immersion?**

El objetivo general de eco-language es unir o enlazar el aprendizaje de la lengua española específicamente al medio ambiente o enseñar la lengua, aprender la lengua, en contacto con el medio ambiente.

**2. Cómo te imaginas el entrelazo con la naturaleza?**

Sabes que las agencias de viajes promueven muchas veces las destinaciones que pagan para que puedan promoverlas, entonces , muchas veces solo es pregunta de dinero, entonces, con un grupo de extranjeros mi perspectiva o mi forma de ver esta idea ellos dicen que es genial porque en la actualidad, en la actualidad es el turismo que se esta tratando de o que el turista busca y no esta encontrando, es ese enlace de turismo donde conoce la cultura realmente, exacto no no no eso es cierto creo que eso ya lo sabemos que es algo innovador y es algo nuevo y creo que vas a tener mucho éxito, solo lo que se me hace un poco difícil es tengo que encontrar criterios para elegir los lugares y como tu ya has elegido los lugares o uno de los lugares. Yo tengo aproximadamente no sé si viste que son como unos 30 o 20 algo así, en general, tu puedes buscar en internet, la información y la descripción del lugar mas profundamente, que se puede aprender dentro del lugar, porque voy a elegir este lugar, que no solamente vamos aprender, sobre las aves o las especies, de animales o la flora y la fauna, también vamos aprender el concepto histórico, del lugar ósea entiendes esa es una clase de español en medio de la naturaleza

**I. Y cómo te imaginas la clase de español?**

Tengo varias métodos o varias alternativas, he pensado una, en la cual yo soy la guía yo, hablo e interactuo con los estudiantes, solo en español, aprendemos del medio ambiente, de lo que se observa, de lo que estamos observando en el medio ambiente como se dice en español como se expresa y también otra parte es como después de u tour sentaros en medio de un paisaje natural, en un circulo, o como una mesa redonda o algo así con un café o una comida tradicional y compartir el ambiente en el cual la experiencia que tuvimos del tour que acabamos de hacer, las opiniones de los estudiantes ósea vamos a interactuar completamente vamos a interactuar usando el idioma en el cual se esta aprendiendo, esa es la metodología mas practica , mas vivencial mas experimental que va a tener el estudiante y el cual va a aprender en un porcentaje mas alto que si tuviera una clase de con un grupo y un profesor como una clase magistral en un cuarto cerrado donde no hay esa experiencia vivencial y Celine eso es garantizado la gente de hoy en dia quiere aprender el idioma porque lo he investigado ósea quiere aprender de esta manera, quiere conocer al país, la cultura y al mismo tiempo, aprender el idioma, son muchos muchos como decir muchas cosas en un paquete, no sé si entiendes, lo veo muy profesional pero lo que quiero decirte eso, no si si si, muchas cosas por un precio por ejemplo o por un como decir u combo ahora la palabra combo es popular.

**3. Cómo se diferencia eco-language immersion de otras ofertas?**

Son 3 cosas importantes que va a tener eco-language immersion. Ves porque la gente quiere siempre ver un volcán una playa es normal y además de eso va hablar con el campesino o con el cafetalero. Y recuerda el entorno de Spanish o el ambiente es crear un ambiente familiar, un ambiente de comodidad, un ambiente de seguridad para el visitante o para el no se como se le dice el estudiante en inversión eso es lo que yo quiero crear como soy yo, creo que a veces como es el padre son los niños dice un dicho en Costa rica no? Es mi cara la imagen de mi personalidad, la quiero transmitir através de Spanish que los estudiantes se sientan cómodos, en familia y no quieran volver a su países porque la experiencia fue fantástica, fue inolvidable, y además con mucho éxito de aprendizaje porque eso es con mucho éxito de aprender mucho, en poco tiempo porque esos, otra de las cosas que las personas quieren hoy en día no? Aprender mucho mucho en poco tiempo y Céline eso es lo que yo quiero que tu interiorices, tal vez en la tésis en reflejar esa idea

**4. Como se diferencia Costa Rica en una estancia de lenguaje comparado con otros países de Latinoamérica?**

Costa Rica es uno de los países con mas diversidad del mundo en realidad Costa Rica contempla el 7% de la biodiversidad del mundo esa es una de las razones principales por las cuales se podía implementar eficazmente el aprendizaje de una lengua con el contacto con la naturaleza.

**5. ¿Cual es el número de participantes ideal para una experiencia así?**

El número ideal de participantes sería entre 5 y 10

**¿y eso por que?**

Porque la idea es tener una experiencia mas personalizada a tener si mas punto de union con el guía, con el profesor, sin embargo se podría ampliar el número hasta quizás 15, 15 máximo.

**6. Cuáles son los grupos diana?**

Me gustaría enfocarme en dos segmentos diferentes de grupo Diana. El primer grupo sería entre las edades de los 20 a los 35 años. Y el segundo grupo entre los 45 y 65 años.

**7. Qué parámetros de opulencia sería el ideal para esta experiencia?**

Serían para un primer grupo de categoría Universitaria y que les guste aprender los idiomas, especialmente el idioma español. Y el segundo grupo debería estar conformado por personas en calidad de pensionados con un deseo muy intenso por explorar la naturaleza y el idioma español.

**8. Qué nivel de español y qué preparación serían adecuados? Todo el grupo de participantes tiene que tener un nivel de español similar?**

Es muy importante que los grupos sean muy homogéneos en su nivel. Es decir se tendría que agrupar, a través de un examen de ubicación que se haría con anterioridad, previa a la visita. Se podrían dividir los grupos en los siguientes niveles: Principiante, Intermedio y Avanzado. Habría una posibilidad de agrupar los niveles Intermedio y avanzado. La referencia será tomada de acuerdo al Marco Europeo.

**9. ¿Cuál es la longitud de días adecuada?**

La duración de la experiencia sería de 10 a 12 días.

**10. Cómo podrían beneficiarse de practicar y/o aprender el español a lo máximo los participantes durante el tour?**

La experiencia y el aprendizaje adquirido sería bastante. Ya que a lo largo de la experiencia se hablará solamente en español. Los participantes estarán en contacto con el idioma español en diferentes ámbitos como: restaurantes, personal de hoteles, familias, personas locales, chóferes, así como la experiencia de tomar las clases cada día con profesores de español.

**11. Cuáles son los principales criterios para definir las compañías asociadas para esta experiencia?**

1.Las compañías deben poseer en lo posible el certificado de ecoturismo otorgado por ICT.

2. Cumplir con todos los estándares de Calidad y seguridad que requiere el ICT.

3. Una gran disposición para brindar la mejor atención y servicio a cada participante.

# Appendix III: Interview with Alberto López

**Fecha:** 11 Octubre 2017
**Medio:** Whats App Audios
**Nombre:** Alberto López
**Organismo**: Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT)
**Ocupación:** Gerente principal

**1. Introducción: Podría hablarme un poco acerca de los objetivos y metas del ICT?**

El instituto Costarricense de Turismo es el equivalente al ministerio de turismo o a la Administración Nacional de Turismo, es el ente rector, en materia turística, en el país y por lo tanto como ente rector le competen varias acciones principales.

La mas importante, que es digamos de entre las acciones sustantivas, la mas importante, tiene que ver con la promoción y con el mercadeo y eso implica que se hacen esfuerzos para que la mayor cantidad de turistas que forman parte del perfil del turista que queremos, venga al país. Me explico un poco con esto. No es que hacemos esfuerzos disparando, promoción y campañas y propaganda adonde sea, si no que tenemos targets definidos, gracias a estudios de mejores prospectos que nos dicen en donde están esos turistas que nosotros queremos que vengan al país y una vez identificados, vamos a convencerlos de que deben venir digamos, así es mas o menos como funcionan los estudios de mejores prospectos.

Entonces el mercadeo es una de las acciones sustantivas e implica desarrollar campañas, promocionales, desarrollar marcas, desarrollar acciones específicas, activaciones específicas, participación en ferias junto con el sector privado entre otras acciones que concluyan en una mayor afluencia de turistas del perfil ideal al país, esa es una de las funciones.

Una vez que el turista ya esta en el país asumimos otras responsabilidades, una de ellas es garantizar que la estancia del turista sea lo más placentera posible y entonces ahí tenemos programas específicos que tienen que ver con mejorar la experiencia del turista, tienen que ver con programas de seguridad turística, señalización turística y tiene que ver por supuesto con aspectos propiamente de la calidad y para garantizar la calidad nosotros tenemos herramientas que nos permiten categorizar a los hoteles con las tradicionales estrellas pero que también nos permiten categorizar entre unos de calidad autoreparadores a renta cars y a las empresas en general del sector turístico otorgándoles un instrumento que nosotros definimos como declaratoria turística, y la declaratoria lo que indica es que la empresa cumple con determinados estándares de calidad que la hacen merecedora de un nivel de estrellas de 1 hasta 5 y también en esa materia pensando en garantizar la grata permanencia del turista , tenemos el certificadora la sostenibilidad turística que es una herramienta diseñada en Costa Rica, inspirada en nuestros empresarios y que puso de acuerdo hace 20 años al sector público y al sector privado para crear una norma de sostenibilidad. Su origen data de 1995 y se hace oficial en 1997 así que estamos celebrando el veinte aniversario y esta norma lo que permite es que las empresas de manera voluntaria puedan aplicar a una norma de sostenibilidad para poder alinearse con la visión país que tenemos de un modelo de turismo sostenible. .
Otra de las funciones importantes, tienen que ver con generar capacidades dentro de los empresarios y promover el emprendurismo y la generación de nuevas capacidades, esto tiene que ver por lo tanto con programas de capacitación que busca identificar potenciales productos, apoyar a que el emprendurismo, surga en esos productos y ayudarlos a que su producto pueda ponerse en valor, que

pueda llegar a un punto en el cual pueda mercadearse, pueda venderse y pueda generar una grata satisfacción.

Y finalmente dentro de las acciones sustantivas por supuesto que esta la acción sustantiva de generar los recursos suficientes para que todas estas todas anteriores se puedan desarrollar, por lo tanto hay una administración que se encarga de la parte financiera contable y administración del talento humano que por ser muy de oficina no podemos dejarla de lado, porque si tiene una participación fundamental. En la institución somos 284 funcionarios de los cuales 240 aproximadamente estamos en la oficina central y los demás están en 6 oficinas regionales ubicados a lo largo del país con el fin de acercar a los empresarios y a los turistas a la institución sin que tengan que venir necesariamente a la capital.

Esos son me parece que en resumen los principales objetivos que nosotros cumplimos obviamente para cada objetivo hay muchísimo de que hablar en cuanto a las acciones específicas que se desarrollan en cuanto a las metas que tenemos para medir ese cumplimiento en cuanto a los indicadores de desempeño que se tienen y por supuesto en cuanto al presupuesto que se le asignan para que cada una de esas pueda ejecutarse.

**a) Me podría hablar de su formación profesional y sus tareas principales?**

Bueno de en cuanto a mi formación soy Economista de pregrado, tengo una maestría en gerencia estratégica y una especialización en sostenibilidad de cambio climático en la Universidad de California Devis y un doctorado en ciencias de la administración.

Yo ingreso al ICT hace 7 años y 2 meses y medio al departamento de sostenibilidad como coordinador de ese departamento, ese departamento es el que precisamente lidera el programa de certificación para la sostenibilidad turística y hace 3 años y casi un mes, se me presenta la oportunidad de optar por la Gerencia General, en la Gerencia es un nombramiento por 6 años de los cuales como le digo ya he pasado un poquito mas de la mitad, pueden ser prorrogables, lo nombra la junta directiva del Instituto Costarricense de Turismo y esto quiere decir que al final de estos 6 años a los cuales le quedan 3 yo regresaría al departamento de sostenibilidad, que es donde tengo mi plaza en propiedad. Dentro de las funciones mas importantes de la gerencia a nivel administrativo soy el responsable de todas las tomas de desiciones a nivel administrativo que tienen que ver con la gestión del talento humano, que tienen que ver con lo eficiente de los recursos tanto el humano como el recurso financiero, el recurso operativo del edificio como tal, y ante la junta directiva que es, mi jefe mi jerarca, la responsabilidad de dar seguimiento a los acuerdos que tome la junta directiva y de llevarle a la junta directiva propuestas de mejora estratégica no únicamente en la toma de desiciones a nivel interno sino además estrategias que impacten positivamente al sector turístico porque hay que recordar que nuestra razón de ser como instituto Costarricence de Turismo, es el sector privado, el sector turístico, es hacer que el empresario, tenga la posibilidad de generar buenos negocios y que por lo tanto pueda generar buena calidad de vida para los colaboradores que contrata y para otros que de manera indirecta se vean beneficiados del sector turístico.

**2. Eco-turismo en Costa Rica**

**a) Cómo definiría usted el eco-turismo?**

Bueno la definición más pragmática digamos de Eco- turismo, incluye 3 actividades nada más:
Caminatas por senderos, observación de flora y observación de fauna, pero ese pragmatismo por lo menos en Costa Rica a venido cambiando muchísimo através del tiempo, cuando las actividades ecoturísticas, de ese contacto digamos directo y prístino con la naturaleza, se combina con otro tipo

de actividades, de aventura que hace que el turista, sea mas parte de las actividades y que por lo tanto también y ahí viene la parte negativa, comience a impactar.
Pero el ecoturismo entonces son ese tipo de actividades, muy pasivas de muchísimo contacto con la naturaleza, con el menor impacto posible, quizás nulo pero que atraves del tiempo a venido evolucionando y convirtiéndose en una actividad un poco diferente.

**b) Qué importancia atribuye al eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

Bueno la importancia es absolutamente del mayor nivel, del más alto nivel. Costa Rica es reconocida como destino turístico en el mundo, primero por sus actividades dentro del ecoturismo, antes que por su belleza escénica y por su belleza natural. Cuando se comienza a sacar provecho a la imagen de destino de una vez ya se comenzó hacer como un destino eco-turístico, entonces la importancia que tiene para Costa Rica es del mas alto nivel.

**c) En su opinión, qué tan sostenible es el eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

Vamos a ver es que hay que diferenciar un poco entre Ecoturismo como una actividad y la sostenibilidad como una visión como una forma de ser, que tan sostenible es.
Bueno es bastante desde el punto de vista de que ya tenemos poco mas de dos décadas promoviendo la sostenibilidad dentro del sector empresarial, nuestra herramienta es la certificación para la sostenibilidad turística y 384 empresas creen en esa herramienta el ICT como el instrumento que ellos tienen, no obstante, estoy seguro que han de haber muchas otras empresas que también tienen practicas y procesos de sostenibilidad implementados dentro de ellas pero que no necesariamente optan por una certificación, porque su digamos, lo que a ellas las llena lo que ha ellos les satisface es hacerlo, no por obtener un certificado, simplemente por la tranquilidad de hacerlo.

**I. Cómo podrían minimizar los impactos negativos al medio ambiente como las emisiones de dióxido de cárbono o el crecimiento de la basura?**

Bueno hay varias formas, el primero probablemente el más importante es que haya algo dentro del ADN del empresario que diga tengo que hacerlo, si eso no se da por más que hayan políticas alrededor por más que la institución como el ICT o el país vaya por una línea determinada, sino logramos mover esa fibra y ese ADN del empresario haciendole saber que esto es importante, para su negocio difícilmente se va hacer. En nuestro país las herramientas que tenemos son vastas, la certificación para sostenibilidad turística es una certificación de sostenibilidad pero dentro de ella hay un ámbito ambiental que promueve precisamente, la reducción de los impactos negativos y las emisiones de CO2 es solo uno de esos impactos, como usted lo menciona ahí es solo uno, y dichosamente CO2 dentro de la estrategia de cambio climático está contemplada como una de esas.

También tenemos programas como bandera azul ecológica, que es un programa que tiene 15 categorías y una de ellas precisamente es acciones contra la reducción de los efectos del cambio climático y nuevamente la reducción de emisiones de CO2 es una de las variables que se miden dentro de este instrumento.

**II. Cómo pueden estar más involucrados los indígenas y las comunidades locales en todos los procesos del turismo?**

Aquí tenemos experiencias muy bonitas con comunidades, donde ya un futuro operador 100% conformado por indígenas pudo obtener la certificación y la declaratoria turística del ICT, eso nos llena de mucho orgullo. Primero por que le demuestra a otros que sí se puede y nos demuestra a nosotros mismos que si tenemos herramientas para poder llegar a grupos digamos tradicionalmente alejados

del producto turístico tradicional pero que tienen un potencial desde el punto de vista de la combinación cultura y naturaleza envidiable.

Entonces si hay formas y la mejor forma, si tuviera que escoger una es, voluntad, es unir las voluntades entre el instituto o entre la administración de Turismo que tiene las herramientas y la comunidad que necesita muchísimo empuje, muchísimo apoyo, porque el producto ellos lo tienen, no tienen que invertir en nada, tienen su cultura que de por si es una herencia para el mundo y además tienen la naturaleza que nadie como ellos sabe cuidarla, porque saben que han vivido de la naturaleza por muchísimos años .

**d) Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas del eco-turismo en Costa Rica (económicos, socio-culturales, medio ambiente?**

Bueno las ventajas son muchísimas, desde el punto de vista económico gracias al Ecoturismo, turismo como actividad propiamente, se ha convertido en el motor de desarrollo de nuestra economía, hoy quizás sea muy fácil decirlo pero a costado mucho llegar ahí, pero turismo genera el 27% del empleo de este país, entre el empleo directo e indirecto, representa el 40% del total de las exportaciones por servicios que tiene el país, eso es cerca de 3 mil millones de dólares perdón, al año, no perdón el dato mas reciente es 3600 millones de dólares al cierre de 2016.

Y en términos del Producto Interno Bruto (PIB) es cerca del 18% entonces esto lo genera el ecoturismo, por supuesto porque esa fue nuestra punta de lanza cuando comenzamos a promocionarnos como un destino ecoturistico, ahí comenzó a saberse de Costa Rica, ya continúo con la que sigue.

**e) Qué tiene que incluir una experiencia turística para ser considerada como ecológica?**

Bueno vamos a ver, bajo nuestra visión reitero, la más pragmática debe de incluir naturaleza, para nosotros, con solo naturaleza estamos únicamente abarcando la punta del iceberg de lo que se puede disfrutar en términos de ecoturismo. Hoy nosotros como destino turístico, nos estamos promoviendo como un destino, que genera experiencias de vida y las experiencias de vida, viene muy de la mano con el turismo de bienestar o wellness. Eso quiere decir que una actividad tradicionalmente vista como únicamente, como un único fin de ecoturismo, esa actividad puede trascender del ecoturismo a una actividad de bienestar, que genere paz que genere tranquilidad, armonía, descanso mental, espiritual, relajación en el ser humano.

Entonces el ecoturismo visto por ejemplo como una caminata por un sendero, pero con los ojos vendados en un grupo controlado de 5 turistas y enseñarle al turista a escuchar la naturaleza, no a verla porque, entre ver y observar también hay una gran diferencia, pero entre ver, observar o escucharla hay una diferencia tremenda.

La experiencia de un grupo de turistas, a quienes se les vendan los ojos y se les guía en un sendero para que aprendan a escuchar la naturaleza esa va ser una experiencia de vida, que nunca se va a olvidar, entonces, ¿Cual es esa experiencia del ecoturismo? Bueno va por ahí un ecoturismo que genere bienestar, un ecoturismo que alimente el alma, un ecoturismo que permita llevarse recuerdos en el corazón, en la mente en la parte espiritual del ser humano y no necesariamente en una cámara fotográfica o en un teléfono porque eso en cualquier lugar del ciberespacio se puede obtener una fotografía, pero en ningún lugar del ciberespacio o el internet se puede encontrar la sensación que genera escuchar la naturaleza en una experiencia como las que les acabo de contar.

**3. Turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica**

**a) Que importancia le atribuye al turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica?**

Es un segmento muy importante hay que ver los datos digamos muy de cerca para poder concluir que efectivamente ahí hay cerca de medio millón de turistas, que ingresan al país con fines académicos o de enseñanza o científicos, todos atribuibles digamos al mismo concepto , es un segmento importante , hay tour operadores en el país especializados en estos grupos porque tienen gustos, intereses, y además necesidades muy diferentes a las del turista tradicional del leisure.

**b) Que importancia tienen las escuelas de lengua en el sector de turismo en Costa Rica?**

Entonces es un segmento muy importante y dentro de el, las escuelas de lengua, no el sector turístico digamos en general, tienen un valor fundamental, no únicamente en cuanto al intercambio del turista que habla otra lengua que no sea la castellana, que viene al país y que quiere aprender no solo de la lengua castellana sino ademas de los costariqueños por decirlo de alguna forma, de la forma de ser y de expresarse del costarricense con frases tan propias como las que tenemos, cobra vital importancia porque no solo estamos enseñando la lengua castellana o español, como comúnmente se le dice, sino que además gracias a la enseñanza de la lengua estamos enseñando cultura del país, porque cada vez que uno trata de explicar que significa determinada palabra, que digamos no es conocida en otros países que hablan la misma lengua, para explicar eso tenemos que ir hacia atrás en la historia y recordar que provocó que un término como esos se haya acuñado y se haya vuelto tradicional, entonces, cobran vital importancia y para nosotros es un segmento importante, hay acuerdos no escritos pero si como escuelas de enseñanza, como Universidades y por supuesto que a lo interno nosotros tenemos un apoyo trascendental desde que creamos una comisión que se llama comisión nacional de educación turística, esa comisión es precedida por nosotros por el instituto costarricense de Turismo y tiene como fin hacer o influir en que las curricular de las universidades que enseñan turismo tengan componentes que sean absolutamente necesarios dentro del sector privado que va ser finalmente el contratante de esas personas.

**c) Está mencionado en un artículo (2015) que el ICT quiere que el Turismo educativo crezca en un futuro próximo.**

Es correcto

**I. Cuales son las razones principales por este interés en el turismo educativo en Costa Rica?**

Ciertamente dentro de los nichos de mayor importancia del país , digamos que el Turismo de enseñanza tiene una importancia secundaria por lo siguiente. Razones digamos del interés educativo en Costa Rica es que hay un plus, que ya nosotros damos por sentado que es el posicionamiento del país, desde el punto de vista de naturaleza, de aventura, de ecoturismo, y sostenibilidad, por lo tanto cuando alguien toma la decisión de ir por ejemplo a aprender español o castellano, o hacer un evento que ya sea una actividad de incentivos o un congreso etc .a un país que no tiene tradición turística o aun país que si la tiene, probablemente va a escoger el segundo.

**II. Hay un crecimiento visible en los últimos años en este subsector?**

Entonces pensamos que nosotros gracias a ese plus que ya tenemos, nos hemos convertido en un destino digamos ya muy apetecido para este tipo de actividades porque uno únicamente viene, por su fin primordial que es el objetivo de aprender un idioma, sino que además saben que en sus ratos de

esparcimiento y de descanso van a tener experiencias, experiencias que ya otro ha contado o experiencias que ya pueden disfrutar, se iba a ser un segmento que sigue teniendo mucho crecimiento, el tema de la cercanía con los Estados Unidos y Canadá al ser Franco y Angloparlantes da que efectivamente que seamos un destino digamos apetecido, deseado por la cercanía de 3.30 - 4 o 5 horas en la mayoría de los casos y entonces si visualizamos que hay aun crecimiento importante y hay un sector privado que se ha ido especializando muchísimo en eso, entonces hay mucha confianza en las empresas que operan en ese tipo de actividades.

**5. Concepto de una inmersión "eco-lenguaje" sostenible en Costa Rica: En su opinión, una certificación de sostenibilidad sería recomendable? Por favor justifica.**

**I. Si la respuesta era sí: Cuáles son los pasos de obtenerla?**

Nosotros absolutamente creemos en la certificación de sostenibilidad es un tema en el que hemos invertido mucho, que hemos invertido tiempo, que hemos aprendido junto al sector privado a implementar la sostenibilidad y por supuesto que si la recomendamos y los pasos son sencillos.
Hay una consulta administrativa donde la empresa se anota, después de esta consulta administrativa, este nosotros hacemos ciertas verificaciones y que consisten básicamente en determinar si la empresa esta cumpliendo con la legislación que tiene que cumplir y una vez concluida esa etapa y habiendo cumplido con todo lo que tiene la empresa en blanco, entonces ya si nos ponemos de acuerdo para darles una inducción.
Esa inducción es una reunión en donde nosotros les vamos contando pregunta por pregunta cual es la respuesta que yo te venia dando y cual es la evidencia que deben demostrar o que deben entregar para demostrar que cumplen con la pregunta.
Una vez hecha la inducción la empresa tiene hasta 6 meses para ponerse de acuerdo con el instituto y realizarles la evaluación de campo, una evaluación que depende del tamaño de la empresa, puede durar 1 o 2 días y ese dia de la visita, es un dia en el cual las empresas y la institución se ponen de acuerdo en la fecha. No es una visita de sorpresa porque la sorpresa porque la empresa debe de estar ese dia preparada con todo lo que requiera para poder demostrar el cumplimiento, entonces no nos gusta ir de sorpresa, sin embargo si hacemos inspecciones sorpresa pero una vez que la certificación haya sido obtenida por la empresa.

**II. Ya que el objetivo es de crear una experiencia sostenible, las compañías asociadas tienen que ser sostenibles también. Cuáles son los principales criterios para definirlas?**

Ya que el objetivo es crear experiencias sostenibles, las compras asociadas tienen que ser sostenibles también por supuesto dentro de la certificación de sostenibilidad turística en el ámbito que se llama planta de servicio, abogamos porque la empresa tenga programas de compras que sean eficientes que tengan que ver evidentemente con la compra de productos orgánicos, segundo con la compra de productos locales, y tercero con la compra de productos no perecederos en cantidades suficientes en contenedores grandes, que permitan que el uso del recipiente en el cual esta el producto minimice el impacto.

Que quiero decir con esto, bueno, no es deseable en una empresa que hayan dispositivos o contenedores pequeñitos de mantequillas o de jaleas, o de miel o de azúcares, por ejemplo si no que la empresa tenga un programa que le permita comprar en grande y disponerlo en la mesa de una forma atractiva, por ejemplo que haga que, se reduzca la cantidad de plásticos, por ejemplo que se esta utilizando.

**6. Realisación de una experiencia sostenible en el mercado de turismo en Costa Rica**

**a) Cuáles son las condiciones para implementar una experiencia así en el mercado turístico de Costa Rica? En qué se tiene que poner atención en específico?**

Yo creo que una de las condiciones importantes es que las certificaciones de sostenibilidad o los mecanismos para demostrar la sostenibilidad sean gratuitos, en nuestro caso el instituto de Turismo asume los costos. Sabemos de muchas otras experiencias donde la empresa debe pagar por la certificación.
Segundo, nos parece que debe seguir siendo voluntaria, en la medida en la que estos procesos de certificación se vuelvan obligatorios, yo creo que se pierde el gusto y se pierde el objetivo de fondo por lo tanto, deben de seguir siendo voluntarios y tercero parte del éxito de implementar experiencias como estas, es un conocimiento profundo de los conceptos entre el instituto que esta a cargo del programa y los empresarios. A nosotros nos costo al inicio porque el empresario entendía por sostenibilidad únicamente temas que tenían que ver desde el punto de vista ambiental, ósea pensaban que eran muy eficientes en sostenibilidad porque tenían una política ambiental muy buena y realmente la norma o la certificación de sostenibilidad demostró en el tiempo que el pilar ambiental es solo 1 de los 4 pilares que tiene.

**b) Cuáles son los pasos de realización recomendables y cómo se pueden alcanzar?**

Los pasos para la realización y recomendaciones...
Bueno primero la voluntad, eso es lo primero, no hacemos nada si el gerente de la empresa quiere hacerlo y los colaboradores no están convencidos, tampoco lo hacemos si los colaboradores están sensibilizados pero el gerente dice no es algo que a mi me interese, por lo tanto debe haber voluntad de ambas partes.

Segundo debe de haber capacitación, absoluta porque reitero no es lo mismo una certificación ambiental, que una certificación de sostenibilidad, hay actores muy muy diferentes y tercero la constancia. Sostenibilidad es una forma de ser, no una forma de hacer, si lo vemos como una forma de hacer, lo vamos hacer hoy y tal vez mañana pero pasadomañana no o en una semana tampoco y lo retomamos en dos o tres meses. Cuando es una forma de ser, es una filosofía de vida, se hace así todos los días, no hay otra forma de hacerlo, eso también debe de ser de unos valores importantes y por supuesto la consistencia, hacerlo siempre, creer en que la reevaluación me da oportunidad de mejora, nunca pensar que soy 100% sostenible que ya no tengo nada más que mejorar eso es una falacia, me parece que esos son pasos importantes.

**c) Dónde y cómo podría ser promocionado este producto de manera sostenible?**

Hay ferias turísticas especializadas en turismo sostenible, pero esas ferias cada vez van a ser menos porque nuestra filosofía es que cualquier feria a la que vayamos, cualquier presentación o conferencia que demos ante el público que sea es una oportunidad para promocionar la sostenibilidad, por lo tanto donde y cómo, donde, donde sea, cómo, siendo convincentes, siendo profesionales del turismo que creen efectivamente que esa es la forma correcta de hacerlo y de esa forma tendremos una mayor penetración digamos en el imaginario colectivo que escucha de sostenibilidad, pero que no necesariamente toma la sostenibilidad, como una decisión como un aspecto como driver final para tomar la decisión de ir a un destino o a otro o si es coger una empresa u otra.

# Appendix IV: Interview with Mildred Acuña Sossa

**Fecha:** 21 October 2017
**Medio:** E-Mail
**Nombre:** Mildred Acuña Sossa
**Organismo:** Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
**Ocupación:** Encargada Cátedra Emprendedurismo Turístico - Gestión y Gerencia de Turismo Sostenible

**1. Introducción: Me podría hablar de su formación profesional y sus tareas principales?**

Soy Bachiller en Turismo, Master en Administración de empresas, Master en Educación a distancia (e-learning) y estoy haciendo un doctorado en Educación en TIC.

Trabajo en la UNED como encargada de cátedra, eso quiere decir que soy la coordinadora de la Cátedra de Emprendedurismo Turístico, responsable de 5 asignatura de la licenciatura en gestión y gerencia de turismo sostenible. Para esas 5 asignaturas elaboráramos los materiales, las experiencias de aprendizaje, las evaluaciones, las ofertamos a través de la plataforma Moodle. Pueden visitar la página web de la cátedra https://www.uned.ac.cr/ecsh/catedras/emprendedurismo-turistico

**2. Eco-turismo en Costa Rica: Cómo definiría usted eco-turismo?**

El turismo ecológico es la actividad turística que se desarrolla procurando no alterar el equilibrio del medio ambiente y evitando causar daños. Cabe mencionar que en los 80 y 90 se hablaba de turismo Ecologico. Actualmente, se ha evalucionado al Turismo Sostenible, ya que el turismo no solo debe estar en equilibrio con la naturaleza sino debe existir responsabilidad entre la parte ambiental, social y economica.

**3. Turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica**

**a) ¿Qué importancia le atribuye al turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica?**

A nivel educativo el turismo permite valorar y rescatar las bellezas naturales, culturales y sociales con la que cuenta el país.

**b) ¿Qué importancia tienen las escuelas de lengua en el sector de turismo en Costa Rica?**

En Costa Rica se han desarrollado varias instituciones que ofrecen la enseñanza del idioma español por temporadas cortas a estudiantes extranjeros, pero también dentro de sus programas ofrecen actividades recreativas, clases de baile, voluntariado a sectores marginales y a parques nacionales.

Es bastante popular para estudiantes principalmente de Estados Unidos porque vienen a Costa Rica a llevar un curso intensivo de español por un mes, que en sus universidades lo llevan en 1 semestre con menor resultado en el aprendizaje y a menor costo.

**4. Concepto de una inmersión "eco-lenguaje" sostenible en Costa Rica**

**a) ¿Cómo ve el potencial de entrelazar el ecoturismo y el turismo de enseñanza?**

En nuestro caso, el turismo está directamente comprometido con la Sostenibilidad de hecho la sostenibilidad es uno de los ejes transversales en el plan de estudios. De hecho, la carrera que se

imparte en la UNED, a nivel de diplomado y bachillerato Gestión Turística Sostenible y la licenciatura es Gestión y gerencia del turismo sostenible

**I. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas en su opinión?**

Definitivamente sólo veo ventajas, ya que los estudiantes y futuros profesionales lo asumen como parte de su accionar, en donde la sostenibilidad va más allá del respecto y protección del medio ambiente sino también de los valores culturales, sociales, naturales, arquitectónicos, entre otros que forman parte de su identidad cultural.

**b) Cómo podría ser la colaboración entre el ecoturismo y el turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica?**

**I. Cómo se podría maximizar el impacto ecológico de la experiencia?**

Creo que, a través de todas actividades turísticas que realizamos, disfrutar y compartir de manera responsable, conociendo plenamente la riqueza ambiental y valorando lo que tiene el país, y trasmitiendo esto a los turistas, ya que todos somos responsable de informar y garantizar dicho respeto.

**II. Cómo se podría maximizar el impacto educativo de la experiencia?**

Creo que para educar debemos investigar, conocer para luego transmitir dicho conocimiento a través de las acciones que realizamos como profesionales en turismo.

**c) ¿Qué tiene que incluir una experiencia turística para ser considerada como sostenible?**

Una experiencia de turismo sostenible es aquella que permite disfrutar de los atractivos naturales, culturales, sociales, etc. de algún lugar o pueblo de manera responsable, sin dañar el entorno y respectando las tradiciones culturales. Haciendo uso adecuado de los recursos, evitar los desperdicios, manejar adecuadamente los desechos, reutilizar recursos y contribuir minimizando el impacto negativo que pueda ocasionar en el lugar visitado.

**I. Cómo podrían interactuar los participantes con los indígenas y/o las comunidades locales?**

En el caso de Costa Rica, por la cercanía, esto es fácil, pero es importante conocer la cultura local, ser muy precavido, observador y sobretodo entender que, según las tradiciones y la forma de vivir las comunidades indígenas, hay actividades o tareas que no se deben realizarse por gente fuera de su pueblo, ya que pueden ser ofensivas.
Por ello, es importante investigar y conocer las normas de comportamiento en dichos sitios y sobretodo evitar ocasionar alguna intromisión.

A nivel de comunidades locales, se debe tener cuidado, indagar acerca de ellos y respetar su forma de vivir.

**II. ¿Cómo puede ser beneficiosa para Costa Rica y los participantes?**

Sin duda alguno, el beneficio de interactuar con comunidades locales o comunidades indígenas, es conocer nuestras raíces, valorar el patrimonio cultural y comprender la forma de actuar de las comunidades. Esto nos permitirá transmitir de manera adecuada el ser costarricense a los visitantes, y sentirnos orgullosos de la diversidad cultural, natural con la que cuenta el país.

**5. Realización de una experiencia sostenible en el mercado del turismo en Costa Rica**

**a) ¿Cuáles son las condiciones para implementar una experiencia así en el mercado turístico de Costa Rica?**

Recordemos que cuando hablamos de sostenibilidad significa un equilibrio entre la parte ambiental, social y económica. Lo que significa que debe ser rentable, que garantice la protección del entorno y sobretodo que se considere y se respete la comunidad.

**¿En qué se tiene que poner atención en específico?**

En lo que se quiere ofrecer, como lo va ofrecer

**b) ¿Cuáles son los pasos de realización recomendables y cómo se pueden alcanzar?**

- Indagar, conocer bien el producto a ofrecer.
- Considerar las empresas locales.
- Concientizar de la importancia y el respeto al medio ambiente y a las costumbres locales.
- Informar normas de comportamiento permitidas.

**c) ¿En su opinión cuales son las fortalezas y oportunidades de este producto?**

Un producto Turístico Sostenible, además de respectar y valorar el entorno permite garantizar la existencia del mismo en el tiempo. Esto contribuye a la concientización del uso adecuado de los recursos y a valorarlos por sus características.

**d) En su opinión cuales son los debilidades y riesgos de este producto?**

a. Cómo pueden ser superados o minimizados?
Uno de los riesgos es que no existe una planificación adecuada, que no conozca o respecte la capacidad de carga de los sitios donde se desea realizar la experiencia. Esto es responsabilidad tanto a nivel gubernamental como empresarial.

**e) En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los grupos diana?**

Si considero que los grupos diana son el público meta al que está dirigido éste tipo de productos, considero que son personas que disfrutan viajar, que les gusta el contacto directo con las comunidades y la naturaleza. Que desean conocer la cultura a través d sus tradiciones, gastronomía, su gente.

**f) ¿Dónde y cómo podría ser promocionado este producto de manera sostenible?**

A través de sitios web institucionales y públicos. A centros educativos, a través de blogs, programas de televisión u otras plataformas.

**6. Conclusión**

a) **Hay recomendaciones adicionalmentes o comentarios personales que quería dar a través de la realización de una experiencia sostenible en Costa Rica?**

Creo que lo mejor para ofrecer una experiencia sostenible es ser auténticos y valorar nuestra identidad cultural.

# Appendix V: Interview with Karianne de Rave

**Fecha:** 11 Octubre 2017
**Medio:** E-Mail
**Name:** Karianne de Rave
**Organismo:** COOPRENA R.L.
**Ocupación:** Consultora y encargada de diseño de producto para Simbiosis (agencia de viajes)

**1. Introducción: Podría hablarme un poco acerca de los objetivos y metas de COOPRENA R.L.?**

COOPRENA R.L. es un Consorcio Cooperativo, un organismo de segundo grado que agremia a cooperativas y otra serie de organismos de la economía social, con el fin de generar desarrollo y un alto impacto social en nuestro país. Somos un organismo de desarrollo no gubernamental, que a lo largo de 17 años, ha amalgamado un modelo de "desarrollo local" que emplea el Turismo Rural Comunitario como el activador económico de los territorios donde se establece. Somos una organización sin fines de lucro, con socios estratégicos como: el BID, FUNDECOOPERACION, OEA, PNUD, etc; entes con los que desarrollamos proyectos de inversión social, preparando a nuestras comunidades para que puedan participar del negocio que desarrolla el país en el turismo de manera que se permita la democratización de los ingresos generados en esta área.

**Visión:**

Ser la mejor red de organizaciones sociales consolidada, que fortalezca el desarrollo local en los ámbitos nacional e internacional, promoviendo un modelo de gestión integral de productos y servicios turísticos alternativos, competitivos y complementarios, con el fin de satisfacer las exigencias del mercado y atender las necesidades de sus afiliadas.

**Misión:**

Somos un Consorcio Cooperativo líder en Turismo Rural Comunitario que brinda a sus clientes servicios de excelencia mediante la articulación de redes empresariales comprometidas con los principios y valores solidarios, con el fin de impulsar el desarrollo sostenible y mejorar la calidad de vida de su base asociativa.

Nuestros afiliados son 23 organizaciones entre los que están: Cooperativas, Asociaciones de Desarrollo y Asociaciones Turísticas, que mediante proyectos ejecutados han permitido encadenar a más de 100 organizaciones que participan del modelo de Turismo Rural Comunitario, distribuidas en 40 comunidades costarricenses. Contamos con el apoyo del INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE FOMENTO COOPERATIVO – INFOCOOP – como un socio estratégico, y el BID, quienes nos han brindado recursos para el desarrollo y fortalecimiento del Turismo Rural Comunitario de nuestro país.

Dentro del proceso de apoyo a las organizaciones, brindamos servicios en:

1. Asistencia técnica y capacitación sin costo: nos ocupamos de dotar a las personas que forman parte de las organizaciones y proyectos afiliados de las herramientas técnicas, tecnológicas y conocimientos para lograr el desarrollo de estos proyectos y que las micro y pequeñas empresas queden en capacidad de brindar un servicio de alta calidad, eficiente y responsable con el ambiente.

2. Financiamiento: por medio del endeudamiento buscamos recursos para financiar el desarrollo de los emprendimientos y fortalecer las inversiones que las organizaciones ya tienen en marcha.

3. Mercadeo y Ventas: antes de que los proyectos entren en operación iniciamos el proceso de promoción y ventas, de manera que se den a conocer y empiecen a generar los ingresos requeridos para su desarrollo y cumplimiento de los objetivos sociales y financieros del mismo, logrando así el desarrollo local esperado en las comunidades impactadas.

4. Central Administrativa: estamos estableciendo una central de reservas que conectará a la red con todos sus afiliados, proveedores de servicios TRC, con COOPRENA R.L., donde se podrá llevar el control de ocupación, contabilidad, flujo de caja y darles un acompañamiento concreto y en función de sus condiciones económicas.

5. Agencia Simbiosis Cooprena Tours: contamos con una agencia de viajes que opera bajo el nombre de SIMBIOSIS COOPRENA TOURS, la cual cuenta con un portafolio de productos turísticos importante, donde el producto estrella es el TURISMO RURAL COMUNITARIO SOSTENIBLE. Esta agencia comercializa el producto de todos y define rutas, circuitos nacionales e internacionales, paquetes y tours de un día, entre otros, para distribuir apropiadamente el beneficio entre las afiliadas. SIMBIOSIS COOPRENA TOURS cuenta con el máximo galardón de reconocimiento en sostenibilidad -CST-, siendo así modelo de sostenibilidad a seguir a nivel internacional.

La **RED ECOTURISTICA NACIONAL** se constituye con el único objetivo de promover el desarrollo del turismo en las zonas rurales en aras de proveer a esas poblaciones una oportunidad de generación de ingresos, que les permita proteger el patrimonio ambiental de este país, convirtiendo este patrimonio ambiental en un activo generador de ingresos, llevando a las personas hacia un desarrollo con responsabilidad. Esto va a asegurar que comunidades enteras tengan una motivación para proteger nuestras áreas silvestres y toda la vida natural para el bien de todos, recuperando nuestros valores culturales y el calor humano natural de los habitantes del campo.

**a) Me podría hablar de su formación profesional y de sus tareas principales?**

Soy holandesa, así que estudié International Tourism Management and Consultancy en la Universidad Ciencias Aplicadas de Breda. Luego saqué una maestría de Gestión de Turismo Sostenible en la Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional en Costa Rica. En Cooprena he estado laborando en el departamento de consultorías y proyectos, dando acompañamiento técnico a Mipymes y proyectos turísticos de turismo rural comunitario en áreas como diseño de producto, permisos, sostenibilidad, fijación de tarifas, gestión de calidad, mercadeo y comercialización, entre otras. Además, desde hace poco la agencia de Cooprena que es Simbiosis Tours quedó a cargo de este departamento, por lo que también me encargo de reservaciones y diseño de producto, junto a tres compañeros.

**2. Turismo rural comunitario en Costa Rica**

**a) En su opinión, qué tan sostenible es el eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

Lamentablemente siempre existirá el “greenwashing”; las empresas que se promueven como “eco” o amigables con el ambiente, pero realmente les falta mucho en esta área. La certificación de Sostenibilidad Turística (CST) del Instituto Costarricense de Turismo ha ayudado para controlar más este aspecto, sobre todo porque esta certificación toma en cuenta 4 ámbitos diferentes (ambiente, sociocultural, económico/cliente y gestión de planta/servicio, y se otorga el nivel según el área con el puntaje más bajo obtenido. O sea, si obtuvo nivel 5 en 3 áreas pero nivel 1 en el otro, se queda con el nivel 1. Cooprena ha dado bastante apoyo a los proyectos de Turismo Rural en el tema de

sostenibilidad, y muchos han adoptado buenas prácticas como el uso de productos biodegradables de limpieza, reciclaje, campañas de ahorro de agua y electricidad, reforestación, campañas de limpieza de playas, comunidades, etc. Muchos están en el proceso de obtener el CST o Bandera Azul Ecológica. En teoría, los proyectos de TRC son bastante sostenibles por naturaleza, por ser de pequeña escala, en armonía con la comunidad (e interacción con ellos) y no generan muchos desechos de esta manera. También existen ecolodges lujosos muy activos y conscientes en este tema, como por ejemplo Lapa Ríos Lodge. Creo que en general, Costa Rica se ha esforzado por ser un destino de alta calidad, con bastante consciencia ambiental y social, con precios altos para el turismo para mantener este estatus y no atraer a personas que vienen a hacer turismo de sol y playa sin integrarse con la población y con problemas como drogas, alcohol, prostitución, generación de basura excesiva etc.

**I. Cómo podrían minimizar los impactos negativos al medio ambiente como las emisiones de dióxido de cárbono o el crecimiento de la basura?**

La basura es un problema bastante grande en Costa Rica, existen tipos de basura para los que no existe un protocolo para deshacerse de ella, por lo que la gente opta por dejarla tirada en cualquier lado. Por ejemplo, muebles, llantas, baterías, electrodomésticos, entre otras cosas. No existe ningún lugar donde entregar estas, o son muy difíciles de encontrar por lo que terminan en los ríos. Aquí el gobierno debe tener una función líder en la solución de este problema. Las emisiones son un problema en el área metropolitano, donde hay muchos vehículos y muchas presas por la falta de planificación vial. Las carreteras no dan abasto y los vehículos pasan mucho más tiempo en la calle que lo necesario. No hay buenas alternativas como el transporte público, ya que estos no son eficientes ni confortables y a veces inseguros. Los buses no cuentan con horarios publicados, no se interconectan bien, y van muy llenos. Recientemente se ha reiniciado el servicio de trenes pero los horarios son muy limitados y no cuentan con parqueo cerca de los estaciones. Tanto los buses como los trenes sufran muchos accidentes (los intersecciones con el tren no cuentan con agujas y cruzan la calle constantemente) por lo que se interrumpe el servicio y las personas se sienten inseguros. Hace falta un metro u otra solución para que la gente se traslada más fácilmente.

**b) En su opinión, los indígenas y las comunidades son involucrados sufisiente en el turismo de Costa Rica? Porfavor justifique su respuesta.**

Algunos grupos indígenas se han involucrado en el turismo, pero muchos de ellos sin o con poca ayuda. Ellos tienen algunas dificultades, como la falta de capacitación y educación, aislamiento geográfico, problemática de tenencia de tierras (muchos no cuentan con títulos de propiedad por tratarse de una reserva indígena y por ende no pueden sacar créditos, sacar ciertos permisos para operar, etc.), falta de tecnología de comunicación (sin señal para celular, sin internet), entre otras cosas. Si veo la cartera de Simbiosis Tours, nosotros contamos con unos cinco proyectos indígenas que comercializamos, lo cual en realidad no es mucho, pero son casi todos los activos y de una calidad básica del país. No se puede trabajar con proyectos que no cuentan con teléfono o correo electrónico, o donde el acceso es demasiado complicado o inseguro.

**I. Cuales son los beneficios de involucrarlos en el turismo?**

El turismo para ellos es una buena opción para tener ingresos adicionales, ya que muchas veces las reservas donde están cuentan con pocas opciones de subsistencia, por lo general son tierras pocas productivas y aisladas, y no hay mucho comercio. El turismo les da una oportunidad de generar ingresos en el lugar donde viven, y motiva a los jóvenes de no olvidar sus raíces, ya que los visitantes vienen a aprender sobre su cultura, idioma y tradiciones.

**II. Cómo pueden estar más involucrados los indígenas y las comunidades locales en todos los procesos del turismo?**

Es muy importante que los indígenas tengan un proceso de acompañamiento para involucrarse en el turismo, no es cuestión de construirles unas cabañas y listo. Ellos tienen que aprender como fijar las tarifas, como promocionarse, cuales requisitos de calidad existen en el mercado, aprender inglés, etc. Nosotros vimos un caso donde un proyecto no había fijado bien las tarifas porque no calculó todos sus costos, y estaban perdiendo cada vez que venían visitantes.

**3. Concepto de una inmersión "eco-lenguaje" sostenible en Costa Rica**

**a) Cómo vea el potenciál de entrelazar el ecoturismo y el turismo de enseñanza?**

I. Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas en su opinión?
En realidad ya están bastante entrelazados por naturaleza, porque el eco turista por lo general viene a aprender, sobre las especies de aves, sobre la cultura, etc, entonces ya viene con ese propósito. Para enlazarlo con la enseñanza del idioma veo ventajas, ya que se aprende mucho más de la cultura y su gente sabiendo un poco más del idioma, la desventaja principal es que si un visitante viene sin ningún conocimiento sería un proceso de bastante tiempo para aprender algo del idioma; en una semana por ejemplo se aprende poco del Español.

**b) Cómo podría ser la collaboración entre el ecoturismo y el turismo de enseñanza en Costa Rica?**

**III. Cómo se podría maximizar el impacto ecológico de la experiencia?**

Realizar actividades para concientizar a los visitantes, mostrar lo difícil que es para un grupo indígena en un lugar aislado llevar los desechos de visitantes a un centro de acopio, ver los impactos de la basura en los ríos, etc. Aprender de la realidad.

**IV. Cómo se podría maximizar el impacto educativo de la experiencia?**

Creo que sería clave tener un contacto muy intensivo con la población local, para poder aprender el español mediante conversaciones con ellos que refuerzan cualquier clase o curso que se dé.

**c) Qué tiene que incluir una experiencia turística para ser considerada como sostenible?**

Cuando hablamos de actividades "sostenibles", usualmente esto significa que podemos realizar la actividad en la misma forma o en forma similar por un tiempo indefinido (sostenible en el tiempo) en tres aspectos principales: Ambiental – la actividad minimiza cualquier daño al ambiente (flora, fauna, agua, suelos, uso de energía, contaminación, etc.) e idealmente trata de beneficiar el ambiente en forma positiva, Social y cultural – la actividad no perjudica a la estructura social de la comunidad donde se ubica ni daña su cultura., Económico – la actividad no solo empieza y luego muere rápidamente debido a malas prácticas empresariales; continúa contribuyendo al bienestar económico de la comunidad local. Una empresa sostenible debe beneficiar a sus dueños, a sus empleados y a sus vecinos. Además, debe: Enfocarse sobre experiencias personales con la naturaleza para mayor entendimiento y aprecio.

- Interpretar y concientizar sobre la naturaleza, la sociedad local y cultural.
- Contribuir activamente a la conservación de áreas naturales o biodiversidad.
- Beneficiar económica, social y culturalmente a las comunidades locales.
- Promover la participación de las comunidades, donde sea apropiado.

• La escala y el diseño de edificios, tours y atractivos son apropiados al entorno local. • Minimizar el impacto sobre culturas indígenas y locales y destacarlas.

**III. Cómo podrían interactuar los participantes con los indígenas y/o las comunidades locales?**

Hospedarse en casas de familia, dejar que los visitantes hagan las actividades tradicionales como moler maíz, sembrar, hacer artesanías, participar en bailes tradicionales, etc. Ser parte de la experiencia auténtica y aprender a través de actividades.

**IV. Cómo puede ser beneficiosa para Costa Rica Y los participantes?**

Promover experiencias auténticas en vez de falsas, conservar el ambiente y la cultura, además de un proceso de aprendizaje mutuo.

**d) En su opinión, una certificación de sostenibilidad sería recomendable? Por favor justifica.**

Al comparar el programa CST con otras certificaciones y sellos en el sector, se llega a la conclusión de que el programa tiene muchas ventajas importantes. El CST es un programa de una entidad gubernamental, y esto aumenta la credibilidad a nivel internacional. Al ser voluntario y gratuito, se minimiza la probabilidad de corrupción. El CST incluye aspectos socio-culturales, aparte de los aspectos ambientales, y por lo tanto aumenta su potencial de venta comparado con certificaciones meramente ambientales. El CST está diseñado para ayudar a los emprendimientos a lograr ahorros e implementar buenas prácticas que incluyen hasta el entorno del emprendimiento. Los criterios del ámbito social son bastante extensos y se enfocan principalmente en el efecto multiplicador del turismo responsable. Otra ventaja importante del CST es su estructura con diferentes niveles de certificación, que permite el mejoramiento gradual. Su requisito de reevaluación periódica da confianza al consumidor de que el emprendimiento sigue cumpliendo con los criterios, en combinación con el uso estricto del logo. La estructura del programa aumenta la probabilidad de alcanzar la "triple rentabilidad" de la sostenibilidad. A través del CST se está creando un campo de estudio, empleo y consultoría muy valioso, que puede ser explotado como un área de pericia de Costa Rica, conocido como un país "verde", a nivel internacional.
Sin embargo, también se logra identificar varios puntos débiles en el programa, que podrían ser mejorados para que sea más justo y más accesible a los pequeños hoteles y albergues. La omisión del ámbito económico en los criterios de evaluación es criticada por expertos. Además, los criterios existentes no incluyen aspectos como la protección del patrimonio histórico y arqueológico, la seguridad de la planta física, ni un rango de consumo aceptable.

Diferentes fuentes han confirmado que existen parámetros de difícil cumplimiento para pequeñas empresas en el programa CST. Entre éstos se encuentra la exigencia de implementar tecnologías limpias, algunos criterios irrazonables y algunos criterios difíciles de comprobar. Los casos analizados muestran que realizar grandes inversiones no necesariamente resulta en una calificación alta en el CST, pero para alcanzar el máximo nivel es indispensable realizar algunas inversiones. Por lo tanto, los hoteles que manejan altas tarifas tienen una ventaja sobre los pequeños emprendimientos con tarifas bajas. Además, del nivel de exigencia en la documentación de la evidencia surge la necesidad de mayor acompañamiento durante el proceso.

**e) Ya que el objetivo es de crear una experiencia sostenible, las compañías asociadas tienen que ser sostenibles también. Cuáles son los prinicipales critérios para definirlas?**

Se podría utilizar el CST como criterio, además de otros como el hábito de reciclaje, participación en actividades como limpieza de playas, reforestación, etc., nivel de concientización hacia los clientes, participación en otros programas (Bandera Azul por ejemplo), uso de tecnologías limpias (paneles solares, biodigestor, reutilizar agua de lluvia para riego, etc), interacción con la comunidad local, principales aspectos económicos (ingresos, ganancias, flujo de caja, etc.), acciones para conservar patrimonio cultural, recurso humano adecuado, contar con permisos y trámites pertinentes para una operación legal.

**V. Una collaboración con COOPRENA R.L. sería posible? Cómo?**

Creo que sí sería posible una colaboración, por ejemplo para orientarles sobre posibles empresas sostenibles a participar, promoción de las experiencias en sus diferentes canales de mercadeo y promoción, convocar a reuniones, entre otras cosas.

**f) Cuál es la estrategia recomendable de trabajar con las comunidades / indígenas y cómo uno se puede aproximar a coordinar/trabajar con ellos?**

Indispensable hablar español, ya que muy pocos hablan inglés, y es recomendable realizar la primera convocación por medio de una organización local/ nacional que ellos conocen. Puede ser en salones comunales o en algunas de las empresas participantes, de forma grupal preferiblemente. Hay que convocar repetidamente y confirmar asistencia, normalmente solo llega el 50% de los convocados lamentablemente.

# Appendix VI: Interview with Vivienne Solis Rivera

**Fecha:** 24 de Octubre, 2017
**Medio:** E-Mail
**Nombre:** Vivienne Solis Rivera
**Organismo:** Coopesolidar
**Ocupación:** Asociada / Técnica

**1. Introducción: Podría hablarme un poco acerca de los objetivos y metas de Coopesolidar?**

CoopeSoliDar R:L es una cooperativa de servicios profesionales que aborda los temas de conservación y derechos humanos. Nuestro trabajo se enfoca en el fortaleicmiento de capacidades locales para el abordaje de la conservacion con mejora del bienestar de las comunidades. Trabajamos de forma transversal los temas de género y juventud.

**2. Turismo rural comunitario en Costa Rica**

**a) En su opinión, qué tan sostenible es el eco-turismo en Costa Rica?**

Tenemos ejemplos concretos que son, pero en el contexto nacional nuestro ecoturismo está lejos de ser sostenible.

**b) En su opinión, los indígenas y las comunidades son involucrados sufisiente en el turismo de Costa Rica?**

No, no ha sido posible el proceso necesario de fortalecimiento de capacidades para lograr acompasar desde estas comunidades el desarrollo turistico y las oportunidades turisticas, siempre estan en desventaja.

**I. Cuales son los beneficios de involucrarlos en el turismo?**

Podemos tener beneficios, sociales, culturales, ambientales y económicos.

**3. Concepto de una inmersión "eco-lenguaje" sostenible en Costa Rica**

**a) Cómo vea el potenciál de entrelazar el ecoturismo y el turismo de enseñanza? Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas en su opinión?**

En nuestro caso el consorcio por la mar en Tárcoles es un buen ejemplo de este concepto y sus beneficios. Se brindan beneficios no solo economicos a las comunidades sino de fortalecimiento al trabajo colectivo, distribución justa y equitativa de beneficios y fortalecimiento de la identidad cultural. También uso sostenible de recursos.

**b) Qué tiene que incluir una experiencia turística para ser considerada como sostenible?**

Beneficios justos y equitativos, fortalecimiento de capacidades.

**VI. Cómo puede ser beneficiosa para Costa Rica Y los participantes?**

Ejecutandolo en la práctica.

c) **En su opinión, una certificación de sostenibilidad sería recomendable? Por favor justifica.**

Se han dado muchas certificaciones de esto ya en Costa Rica, no cambia nada la certificación si no se plantean las necesidades y capacitdades reales de las comunidades locales.

d) **Una collaboración con Coopesolidar sería posible? Cómo**?

Tenemos ejemplos concretos de cómo se ha promovido este tipo de turismo en comunidades costero-mainras.

e) **Cuál es la estrategia recomendable de trabajar con las comunidades / indígenas y cómo uno se puede aproximar a coordinar/trabajar con ellos?**

Respeto absoluto a sus identidades, consentimiento informado previo, derechos humanos y fortalecimiento de capacidades.

**4. Realisación de una experiencia sostenible en el mercado de turismo en Costa Rica**

a) **Cuáles son las condiciones para implementar una experiencia así en el mercado turístico de Costa Rica? En qué se tiene que poner atención en específico?**

Derechos humanos y conservación.

b) **Cuáles son los pasos de realisación recomendables y cómo se pueden alcanzar?**

Consentimiento informado previo.
Visión a largo plazo
Distribución de beneficios
Acompañamiento ycompromiso.

c) **Dónde y cómo podría ser promocionado este producto de manera sostenible?**

En todas partes y por todos los medios.

## Appendix VII: Proposed schedule

# 12-days eco-language immersion

*A Travel learning program in Costa Rica*

## Introduction:

Costa Rica is Central America's greatest hidden gem, one of the countries with the most biodiversity in the world and which has devoted over a fourth of its land to conservation and natural protection. It is the perfect spot for all environment and conservation enthusiasts thanks to its incredible natural beauty and fascinating ecological story.

The aim of this journey is to discover Costa Rica's lush forests, magnificent waterfalls, majestic volcanoes and diverse ecosystems whilst improving the Spanish language and learning about the natural environment together with a small group of like-minded people. Local naturalist experts and guides will share their knowledge and experience by introducing the group to colourful birds, wild animals and rare species.

## This program consists in:

- 2-hours of daily Spanish Classes
- Guided day and night tours in natural reserves and conservation areas
- Activities and workshops in nature
- Evening group discussions
- Sustainable travelling and living

## The participants have the opportunity to:

- Connect with like-minded people and build life-long friendships
- Practice and improve their Spanish skills
- Experience the lifestyle of local communities and hear their stories
- Have a real natural immersion
- Learn from local guides
- Acquire further knowledge about the environment, conservation and sustainability
- Discover the natural beauty of Costa Rica in an authentic way

**Proposed Itinerary**

**DAY 1: Alajuela**

**Tacacori Eco Lodge**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Afternoon** | Arrival at SJO International Airport<br>Meet and Greet inside the airport and coach transfer to accommodation (15min)<br>Check-in at Tacacori Eco-Lodge<br>Welcome Drink and refreshments: *organic coconut water and fresh local fruits*<br>Welcome speech by Manager of Spanish & Culture and Professional Naturalist Guide<br>Introduction Games |
| **1900** | Dinner and overnight at the lodge |

**DAY 2: Alajuela-Monteverde**

**Albergue La Casona**

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast at the Lodge |
| **0915** | Departure to Monteverde |
| **1300** | Arrival in Monteverde<br>Check-in and lunch at Albergue la Casona |
| **1400-1600** | **Interactive Spanish Class**: Tropical forest<br><br>*Free Time to explore the surroundings* |
| **1745-1915** | Night Walk Tour |
| **1930** | Dinner |

**DAY 3: Monteverde**

**Albergue la Casona**

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0930-1030** | Transport to Don Juan |
| **1030-1230** | **Spanish Class with organic food Workshop:** Organic Food |
| **1300-1500** | Guided Tour Chocolate / Coffee / Sugar Cane<br><br>*Free time in Monteverde village* |
| **1700-1800** | Transport back to Albergue la Casona |

| | |
|---|---|
| **1900** | Dinner |
| **2000-2040** | Discussion round |

## DAY 4: Monteverde-El Castillo

### Rancho Margot Eco Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0915-1230** | Transport to El Castillo<br>20min Stop in Cañas, Restaurant |
| **1230** | Arrival and check-in at Rancho Margot Eco Lodge |
| **1300** | Lunch |
| **1400-1600** | **Interactive Spanish class:** How to live sustainably |
| **1700-1830** | Group activity: competition with option to win a Spa voucher |
| **1900** | Dinner |

## DAY 5: El Castillo

### Rancho Margot Eco Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0900-1100** | **Spanish lesson:** Sustainability in agriculture |
| **1100-1230** | Introduction to either Cow Milking or Fishing |
| **1300** | Lunch (Fish and Milk to be used) |
| **1400-1600** | Guided Ranch Tour |
| | *Free time for:*<br>*El Mirador Self-Guided Hike, Yoga Class, Forest Trail, Natural Pools, Library* |
| **1900** | Dinner |
| **2000-2040** | Discussion Round |

## DAY 6: El Castillo-Bijagua

### Heliconias Rainforest Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0915-1200** | Transport to Bijagua |
| **1200-1300** | Lunch at Hummingbird Café |
| **1300-1500** | Meeting with local youth cooperative COOPEJUBI<br>**Plant a tree to off-set carbon emissions** |
| **1530** | Arrival at Heliconias Rainforest Lodge |
| | *Free time* |
| **1700-1900** | **Interactive Spanish class:** Rural Community Tourism |
| **1900** | Dinner |

## DAY 7: Bijagua

### Heliconias Rainforest Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0900-1100** | **Interactive Spanish lesson:** Rural Community Tourism |
| **1130-1630** | Río Celeste tour (horse back)<br>Picnic lunch |
| **1700** | Arrival back at the Lodge |
| | *Free time* |
| **1800** | Early Dinner |
| **1900-2030** | Speech followed by workshop: Rural Community Tourism |

## DAY 8: Bijagua-Tirimbina Biological Reserve

### Tirimbina Biological Reserve

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0900-1130** | Transfer to Tirimbina Biological Reserve |
| **1130** | Arrival at Tirimbina Lodge |
| **1200** | Early Lunch |
| **1330-1530** | **Interactive Spanish Class:** Flora & Fauna |
| | *Free time to explore the surroundings and talk to researchers* |
| **1800** | Early Dinner |
| **1900-2030** | Guided Night Walk through the Biological Reserve (Flora & Fauna) |

## DAY 9: Tirimbina Biological Reserve-Tortuguero

### Lirio Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0600-0630** | Early Breakfast |
| **0630-0830** | Bird Tour |
| **0900-1200** | Transport to La Pavona |
| **1300-1530** | Boat ride to Tortuguero National Park |
| **15.30** | Approximate Arrival Time at Lirio Lodge |
| | *Free time* |
| **1700-1900** | **Interactive Spanish Class:** Conservation |
| **1900** | Dinner |
| **2030-0000** | Sea turtle night Tour |

## DAY 10: Tortugero

### Lirio Lodge

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Breakfast |
| **0900-1100** | **Interactive Spanish Class:** Conservation of endangered sea turtles |
| **1230-1330** | Lunch |
| **1400-1630** | Expedition through the natural conservation area (canals by boat) |
| **1900-2000** | Dinner |
| | *Free time* |

## DAY 11: Tortugero-San José

### Aranjuez Eco Hotel

| | |
|---|---|
| **0515** | Meet at the Lobby for Departure |
| **0530-0800** | Boat ride to La Pavona |
| **0830-1130** | Transport to San José<br>15min Stop in Guapiles |
| **1130** | Approximate Arrival time at Aranjuez Eco Hotel |
| **1300** | Lunch at the hotel |
| **1500-1700** | Guided walking tour along the main points of interest of the city |
| **1700-1900** | **Spanish Class:** Cultural heritage - Guided tour of the National Museum of Costa Rica |
| **1900** | Final Dinner at Nuestra Tierra<br>Speech & Discussion/Feedback round |
| **2100** | Transport back to the Hotel or individually |

## DAY 12: San José

| | |
|---|---|
| **0800-0900** | Traditional Costa Rican Breakfast |
| | *Departures* |

# Appendix VIII: Benchmarking

**Benchmarking**

| Offer / Criteria | Costa Rica Hands on Learning | Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica | Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic | Nature & Spanish Course | Eco Adventure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Location** | | | | | |
| Company/Organisation | Horizontes Nature Tours Costa Rica | ITHACA College, New York | EF - Education First | La Montaña - Learn Spanish in Bariloche | Mantis Environmental |
| Country | Costa Rica | United States | World-wide | Argentina | Montréal |
| **Offer** | | | | | |
| Country | Costa Rica | Costa Rica | Dominican Republic | Argentina | North and South Hondusras |
| Overall themes | Sustainability, CSR, innovation, farming | Sustainable tourism practices | Environmental Sustainability, Youth Development, Responsible Tourism | Spanish language; natural surroundings of Patagonia | Biodiversity Conservation and Restoration |
| Seasonality/Dates | n.a. | January 2-11, 2018 | n.a. | All year around | n.a. |
| Characteristics | Program divided into topics:<br>A nation with an army of teachers<br>Harvesting for the Future<br>Together we are Stronger<br>The stronger you are the more responsibility you have<br>The future is on the horizon<br>Sustainability and Climate change<br>Government related institutions | Combined learning about about sustainable ecotourism practices and (adventure) activities in nature | Environmental sustainability learning through hands-on service project in a village by helping local communities; group discussions; two guided tours and a water activity | Spanish Program specially designed for nature enthusiasts who want to learn the Spanish language and about the fauna and flora of Nahuel Huapi National Park | Hands on learning and experience with biodiversity identification and restoration in both the Canadian and Honduran contexts. Participants are given the tools to recognize local and international biodiversity hotspots and the services they offer as well as learn about the multitude of species living there. |
| Places of interest | Poás Volcano / Doka Coffee Estate / Florida Ice and Farm / San José / Sarapiquí / Arenal Volcano / Playa Hermosa | Alajuela / La Amistad International Park / Tárcoles / Peninsula de Osa / Manuel Antonio National Park / Monteverde | Santo Domingo / Central Mountain Region / National Marine Park | National Park Nahuel Huapi / Bariloche | Roatan / Ceiba / Solado / Riu Congrejal |
| Choice of off-the-beaten-track /remote destinations | All destinations are very well-known and touristy | Altamira, Tárcoles | Mountainous region | National Park Nahuel Huapi | All destinations are well-known and touristy |
| Choice of unique/remote activities | Visit of innovative/sustainable University, farm visit, local development agency visit, | Skywalk hanging bridges | Service project with a local community | Excursions into the wilderness of the national park | Visit of CREDIA |
| Number of participants | up to 50 | Aprox. 10 | n.a. | max. 6 | 6 to 15 |
| Length (days) | 10 | 10 | 8 | min. 7 | 7 to 14 |
| Target Audience | Students | Enrolled Students (3 Credit University course) | Students and Teachers | students, nature enthusiasts, biologists, photographers, bird-watchers, ornithologists with an interest in the Spanish language | Students from 15-19 years |
| Accommodation | (Eco-)Hotels / Rainforest lodge | Eco-lodges | Hotels | Homestay or Hostel | n.a. |
| Package inclusions | Accommodation<br>Breakfast<br>Activities | Accommodation<br>Meals<br>Guides<br>Vans<br>Park admissions<br>Travel insurance | Airfares & Transportation<br>Hotels<br>Regional Meals<br>Field Director<br>25 Service Hours<br>Volunteer & Leadership Activities<br>Guided Sightseeing<br>Entrances<br>Full-time Tour Director<br>Expert local Guides | Welcome Pack and On-site orientation<br>20h of Spanish/week (9am-1pm)<br>Spanish course materials<br>Materials on Flora and Fauna<br>Coffee, Tea, Snacks<br>Local Discounts & Benefits<br>Wi-Fi and Internet Access<br>Free Airport Pick-up (>2 weeks courses) | Training<br>Meals<br>Travel<br>Workshops<br>Debriefing |
| Not included | Airfares / meals / tips / airport departure taxes | Airfares | Optional: more service hours | Airfares / meals | Accommodation |
| Price | Depending on choice of accommodation options: basic/medium/top<br>Tour options: basic/top<br>Transportation 2 price ranges: 10-20 Pax and 21-50 Pax | USD 2250 (based on ten students) | Depending on origin (flight)<br>Student price (under 20)<br>Option of 4 monthly payments<br>Teachers travel free with every six students enrolled<br>Price eg. from New York: USD 3300 / USD 2850 students | n.a. | CAD 2800-3650 |
| **Ecological aspects** | | | | | |
| Places of ecological interest | Local village / EARTH University / Don Juan Farm / agency for development Ciudad Quesada / local school | La Amistad International Park / Mangrove Forest / Cloud Forest Reserve / | Central Mountain Region, UNESCO heritage sitze of the colonial city of Santo Domingo | National Park Nahuel Huapi | Centro de Documentación e Interpretación Ambiental (CREDIA) / La Ceiba (ecotourism capital of Honduras) / visit some of the most important ecosystems on the planet |
| Depth of immersion in nature | High | High | Medium; rather cultural immersion | Low | High |
| Activities in nature | Nightwalk at La Tirimbina<br>Zipline Tour<br>Hot Springs | Hiking through La Amistad International Park<br>Chocolate Tour (sustainable agricultre in the tropics)<br>Kayak through Mangrove Forests<br>Hiking on hanging bridges through Monteverde Cloud Forest | Swimming and snorkeling | 3 after class activities / week | Visit and help out Iguana Centre<br>Canoe Trip in Cuero and Salado Refuge |

| Offer / Criteria | Costa Rica Hands on Learning | Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica | Environmental Citizenship in the Dominican Republic | Nature & Spanish Course | Eco Adventure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Educational aspects** | | | | | |
| Learn approach | Theoretical and experiential | Theoretical and experiential | Very practical | Spanish classes combined with environmnetal learning | Mainly experiential |
| Teaching methods | Hands-on-learning / lectures / experiential | Lectures / experiential | Service work | Morning: Classroom lectures (20h) / Afternoons: experiential | Experiential |
| Areas of interest | Best practices in agriculture / sustainable tourism development / innovative & sustainable educational approach / forest at night / sustainable practices / rural initiatives / Natural History & Culture | Learning about sustainable ecotourism practices that protect biodiversity and natural resources, use alternative energy and organic methods, and support local communities | Engaging with local communities and work towards environmental sustainability | Learning about Patagonian steppe, southern beech forest, transition forest, aquatic habitats (wetlands, rivers and lakes), and others ecosystems | Hands-on learning and experience with biodiversity identification and restoration; Honduran context |
| Teachers and guides | Local experts / community leaders / Tourism Board<br>Each project in the program includes a visit guided by an expert within that project | All activities led by certified Costa Rican guides trained in tropical biology | Field Director / Full-time Tour Director / Local expert guides | Outdoor activities: led by an experienced and renowned biologist, nature interpreter and photographer<br>Language lessons: held in La Montaña Spanish School (Bariloche) | Local experts |
| **Sustainability** | | | | | |
| Environmental pillar (reduce, reuse, recycle) | Eco accommodation<br>Print of documents = compensation<br>Promoting good environmental practices in all activities | Eco accommodation | Hands-on projects on environemental sustainability and sustainable tourism | n.a. | Information about impact of the trip |
| Socio-cultural pillar (positive cultural exchange) | Contact with locals (farm visit) | Supporting local communities by staying in remote villages | Work with local non-profits to understand the communities' needs | Homestay option = immerse into local culture | n.a. |
| Economical pillar (supporting the local economy) | Accomodation owned by ticos<br>Activities of local communities supported<br>local Naturalist Guides | local guides | supporting the development of local communities | Local language school with local teachers<br>Local guide<br>Local homestay families and hostels | Contributing to the local economy |
| Certification | Tirimba Rainforest Center: level 4 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| **Overall experience** | | | | | |
| Mix of education and activities | Good mix of adventure, educational and nature activities | Good mix of activities and education | Learning through hands-on service project | Focus on Spanish language learning; nature education as add-on | Partnership with a school or educational institution |
| Competitive advantages | Destinations visited | Great variety of destinations | Contact to local communities = full cultural immersion | Spanish classes for all levels (Beginner to Advanced) | Program available in English and French |
| | Sustainable development approach | Small group | Internationally reowned company | Spanish classes in small groups (max. 6 students) | Cooperation with Canadian and Honduran organisations: Planetair, Unisféra, Fundación Cuero y Salado |
| | Highly qualified guides | High level of teaching | | Length of stay to choose freely | Preparation workshops on development, gender, education as well as team building will be provided in order to let the students understand their impact the EcoAdventure has on the people they will visit. |
| | Proven quality assurance program | Package includes everything except for airfares | | | EcoAdventure will be organized according to the needs of students, depending on their abilities, interests and background knowledge |
| | 24/7 service<br>Authentic<br>30 years of experience | Group of university students = same level of education as well as similar interests | | | |
| | Pick and choose preferred areas or projects, and add sites within the country plus adventures or entertainment opportunities. Each party can combine the choices available in its preferred format, to produce the desired trip. Some can emphasize a segment, or a topic, or include more or less educational topics and balance the trip as desired by including adventure or relaxation. | | | | |
| | can design customized Learning Experience by sending preferences | | | | |

## Author's declaration

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow: Silvia Ulate Soto, Alberto López, Mildred Acuña Sosso, Karianne de Rave, Vivienne Solis Rivera.

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