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Sustainable Tourism Study through Solimar International

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STUDY
THROUGH SOLIMAR INTERNATIONAL

Sustainable Tourism Study through Solimar International

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PIM 74

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Multicultural and Diversity Studies at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this proposal do not reflect those of Solimar International and/or any other parties involved

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Abstract

This inquiry explores a pragmatic approach of sustainable tourism and its application as a transformative development instrument. It seeks a general understanding of the global tourism sector, looks specifically at an individual tourism enterprise, Solimar International, and examines rural tourism, and its proposed standards. It discusses the opportunities and threats to the culture, ecology, and livelihoods of the residents of destination tourism and the unique experience to geotourists. It analyzes the theoretical development history of tourism and the integrated approach of Solimar International as a leading agency in the tourism industry sector. And it seeks to understand a new type of tourism that is welcomed by geotourists. It's a small research project hoping to produce learning about sustainable tourism for community based micro-economies that create livelihoods for the residents and authentic experiential tourism for geotourists without damage to the environment and culture.

Introduction

Purpose and significance of the inquiry

Tourism has been an important vehicle for promoting economic development and sustaining ecological and cultural conservation while primarily functioning as a prevalent global intercultural experience bridge. It is widely being adopted around the globe to promote economic development and address sustainability, while recognizing the necessity of inclusivity of underprivileged people and the pragmatic safeguarding of ecology and culture.

The World Tourism Organization, as the leading organization of the sector and responsible UN agency, promotes tourism as a potent development instrument, with 157 nation members and other entities across different sectors including private, academic and non-profit associations.

Today tourism is one of the most powerful economic development tools and one of the largest industries on the planet. Solimar (2014) reports that the tourism sector supports 10% of all economic activity on the planet and 8% of all global employment.

Rural tourism is a rapidly growing sector of the global tourism industry and brings both opportunities and threats to the destinations and communities residing there. Connecting different stakeholders of this sector to have transparent understanding and participatory co-operation thus builds sustainable tourism. This inquiry will be a descriptive study of sustainable tourism through the Solimar International enterprise model. In addition, it seeks to understand the application of digital platforms in marketing in today's world.

This inquiry also explores to seek new tourism trends and the potential educational values

that can be acquired through sustainable tourism, which celebrates cultural diversity and develops multicultural perspectives. Ultimately, it is these multicultural educational experiences that will contribute to the collectivity of all in fighting the divisions, the chauvinistic nationalism, the radicalism and the complicated unjust geopolitics around the globe.

Background

Solimar International is a small tourism development and marketing enterprise headquartered in Washington D.C. in the United States of America, and it has field offices and partners around the globe. It operates in communities, destinations and cities within the US and around the globe in partnership with best networks and professional people in their respective fields administering demonstrated and empirical-based sustainable tourism development services.

It works solely in the tourism industry sector with a team of specialists committed to Solimar's mission to assist businesses, travelers, and destinations develop and connect to sustainable tourism experiences that support environmental conservation, celebrate local culture, and enhance the lives of residents. And it (Solimar, 2014) holds a vision of how sustainable tourism can stimulate economic growth while conserving natural resources and cultural heritages.

Inception of This Research

The research was began as the result of an internship. For the last decade up to 2014, I have worked in the philanthropic development sector on the Tibetan plateau, jointly working

with Tibetan communities in China, in partnership with international organizations and western embassies in Beijing. Serving as an independent centering-local development practitioner and as a cultural sustainability officer, I had opportunities to work with people of diverse backgrounds to design and implement programs.

I have been exceptionally fortunate to work with many genuine people from all walks of life, standing shoulder to shoulder in assisting underprivileged people and communities with pragmatic-oriented and participatory approaches. This karmic voyage gradually developed a passion in me to safeguard cultural heritages and support livelihoods by empowering local people and communities to help themselves through accessing equitable industrial skills, knowledge, opportunity and marketplaces.

During my internship, I participated in two sustainable tourism development symposiums in Washington DC and through them learned that Solimar International implements many cutting-edge programs and empirical multicultural experiences in order to create an integrated approach. As a result, my collective experiences inspired me to study sustainable tourism through Solimar International.

Solimar Experience and Partnership

Solimar International provides comprehensive management consultation, destination strategic-planning, and marketing in diverse and multicultural societies. Solimar (2014) has over sixteen years' experience working on tourism development and marketing projects in more than five hundred communities, has supported over two hundred destinations, assisted twenty-five hundred enterprises, and inspired twenty-five million travelers in over sixty countries worldwide.

It has a history of working with National Geographic, the Smithsonian Institution, The World Bank, the George Washington Institute of Tourism Studies, the Adventure Travel Trade Association, Tourism Cares, Destination Marketing Association International, The United Nations World Tourism Organization, the UNESCO World Heritage Centers, USAID, state governments, World wildlife Foundation, Expedia, Wildlife Conservation society, Travel Forever-Global sustainable Tourism Council, Inter-American Development Bank, International Finance Corporation, Group Rosario, Millennium Challenge, Conservation International, Checonomics, Cardno Emerging Markets Groups, US Forest Service, FHI360, Namibia Wildlife Resort, Namibia Tourism Board, Uganda Wildlife Authority, TOTAL, Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Resources Legacy Fund, Walton Family Foundation, and private clients (Solimar, 2014).

Solimar's Team

The founder, who is also President and Chief Executive officer, is specialized in marketing and sustainable tourism and has over a decade of experience in the tourism industry. While running Solimar International, he has served in multiple roles at various institutions, industrial alliances and organizations of the tourism sector. Prior to Solimar, he worked in the financial sector and served as a marketing specialist.

The chairman is an awarding winning scholar as one of the top experts in tourism policy and strategic-management and has over forty-two years of international experience.

Other members have their own unique professional experiences in building partnerships with various strategic-partners and running financial sustainability, business management,

destination development, strategic-planning, and entrepreneurial development programs.

Contracting Mechanisms and Professional Services

Solimar International is one of the leading sustainable tourism development firms providing comprehensive sustainable tourism development services. Solimar International is the main player with a holistic approach for the architecture of tourism destinations and marketplaces contracting with governments and foundations across the Global North.

Apart from the large quantity of regular business partnerships throughout United States and globe community, Solimar holds two distinctive advantages with its outstanding qualifications. Solimar (2014) holds Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IQCs) and Indefinite Delivery Quantity Contracts (IDIQs) to acquire pre-qualified firms or consortia of firms to USAID in tourism sector abroad. Its proven contracting service mechanisms qualified to USAID services.

Solimar International believes in the transformative power of tourism with holistic engagement, working hand-in-hand with the business profession and academic research entities in every phase of the tourism development process. It practices constant innovation and utilizes leading specialized expertise, empirical engagement and strong partnerships while adhering to specific, conscious standards.

As a world leading sustainable tourism consulting firm, Solimar International keeps up to date with the constantly changing development trends. It equips itself and its partners with proven methodologies, marketing, and management to ensure the objects of safeguarding the

cultural and ecological heritage of destinations while promoting the economic development and wellbeing of residents. And Solimar International is a prominent player influencing the future direction of sustainable tourism in its many aspects, including destination architecture, policy orientation, sustainable management, and marketing. Particularly it shows strong networks and partnerships in both international and rural communities around the globe.

The Inquiry Question

Primary Inquiry Question:

How does the sustainable tourism of Solimar International catalyze as a holistically-transformative development instrument?

Sub-question?

- 1) What are the characteristics of the integrated sustainable tourism approach?
- 2) How is the infrastructure of Solimar International built?
- 3) What are the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism?
- 4) How do digital tools get incorporated into sustainable tourism?
- 5) What are the growing new trends of sustainable tourism?

Literature Review

There is a large portion of diverse literature about tourism across the globe. For this inquiry, I am focusing on literature pertaining to a few transformative tourism development practices from the Global North.

Sustainable tourism today has diverse definitions and standards as it takes places in different societal contexts and through which multi-faceted perspectives and concepts are

developed.

Dangi and Jamal (2016) pointed out that “sustainable tourism was initially brought into discussion as a sub-set of sustainable development Goals in 1970s by UNESCO, and then it was identified as one of the five main industries in need of achieving sustainable development in *The Agenda 21 Action plan* from the Rio Summit in 1992.”

Subsequently, numerous research results followed. Farrell and Twining-Ward (2005) presented that “Sustainable Tourism as a complex and dynamic system requiring careful management, including resiliency planning, risk assessment, hazard mitigation and adaptive planning, collaborative planning for sustainable tourism and multi-stakeholder involvement are key principles for good governance and management.”

Initially Hose (1980) in England defined that “Geotourism (Geographic Sustainable Tourism) is purely geological and geomorphologically – focused as abiotic nature based tourism.” Later, local cultural aspects were brought in as seen in National Geographic's (n.d.) definition of Geotourism as a tourism that “sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents.”

Tourism has recently been recognized as an important industry in the world economy and especially in "developing countries." The World Tourism Organization (2005) stated “that tourism, in all its forms, is arguably the largest industry in the world, having grown rapidly and almost continuously for the last 20 years, and the growth of the international tourism industry has been particularly important to poorer countries. Between 1990 and 2000, international tourism

receipts increased 133 percent in developing countries. During the current decade (2000–2010), WTO forecasts that the number of international visitor arrivals will grow five times more rapidly in developing countries than more established destination markets. The World Tourism Organization (2008) encouraged all stakeholders to follow the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in the industry.” This shows that given the size of the industry, there are high hopes that it will positively impact communities, but also concerns over the impacts it could have both on those communities and environments. There are also efforts to understand and manage those impacts.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2008) launched Tourism Criteria at the World Conservation Congress. It proposed that criteria of Destination Criteria (GSTC-D) and Hotel & Tour Operator Criteria (GSTC-H&TO) should be the minimum standard that any tourism business should aspire to reach, in order to protect and sustain the world’s natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation.

In addition to specific criteria, there are also broad frameworks for considering the impact of tourism. National Geographic Society (n.d.) presents a succinct description with the characteristics that “Geotourism is *Environmentally responsible* - committed to conserving resources and maintaining biodiversity, *Culturally responsible* - committed to respecting local sensibilities and building on local heritage, *Synergistic* - bringing together all elements of geographical character to create a travel experience that is richer than the sum of its parts and appealing to visitors with diverse interests.”

The Geotourism framework was founded in 2003 by National Geographic Society and together managed in partnership with Solimar International from 2010 to 2016. This framework

(NGS, 2003) includes the following features: guides by locals, local stewardship councils, destination branded MapGuides, companion print guides, a business plan, a marketing plan, marketing campaigns, and metrics identified.

Geotourism is a large multicultural market manifested into varieties across the globe. The principles of sustainable travel are widely supported by travelers from the United States. As cited by National Geographic (n.d.), according to the 2003 Geotourism Study, it was found that sixty-five million American households were inclined to support the Principles of Geotourism that benefit residents economically, support integrity of place, inform both visitors and hosts, and mean great trips.

This review of the literature explained the complexity and significance of sustainable tourism. It presented varieties of definitions, concepts and standards throughout the last three decades and that we still do not have a universally agreed understanding but the key features are roughly the same. Sustainable tourism is a dynamic industry supporting economic development of the world economy through employment and exports. And sustainable tourism brings positive opportunities of creating cultural conversation, mutual understanding, and promotion of social well-being while sustaining culture and environment. Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of authentic and diverse experiences to travelers. Sustainable tourism needs the active participation of both travelers and local residents in order to benefit everyone involved. Thus destination communities will become economically sustainable and socially healthy, and the conservation of biological and cultural heritages for the well-being of everyone and the planet will be realized.

As a small research project, this effort explores a framework of sustainable tourism that is

well demonstrated as a pragmatic, proven concept – a geotourism framework successfully in use by geotourists, enterprise communities, and markets, with the support of communities and stakeholders at the destinations.

Solimar International (2014) states that “tourism is one of the most powerful tools for promoting economic and social development in rich and poor countries alike, and today it supports 10% of all economic activity on the planet and 8% of global employment.”

As a world leading sustainable tourism consulting firm, Solimar International keeps up to date with the constantly changing development trends and equips itself and partners with proven methodologies, marketing, and management to adjust the destinations to ensure to safeguard cultural and ecological heritages, and promote the economic development and wellbeing of residents while sustaining the business.

Inquiry Methodology

Approach and Rationale

The geotourism framework was widely applied for many sustainable tourism development programs for diverse communities. It is a proven methodology which provides an inclusive platform extensively involving residents in the planning, developing, and marketing, through all stages, of developing a complete tourism destination. I applied the geotourism framework to analyze the approach Solimar International applies in serving its clients and developing destinations. Here I particularly paid attention to values, fair trade, viable safeguards of ecology and cultural heritages. And I analyzed to identify the result of the approach that Solimar International used.

With this framework, I processed and discerned the qualitative data. I processed varieties of materials of publicly-available information or consented documents. I was sensitive to assess the participation of marginalized people and especially rural, impoverished communities. There was not quantitative data available either amongst publicly-available information or consented documents.

Data Gathering Methods

I analyzed publically-available information about organizational infrastructure, sustainable tourism programs, and practical tools generously shared by Solimar International and its partners. Solimar provided abundant information about its past and ongoing activities. Some of these programs were sponsored with public funds and were hence freely accessible for non-commercial purposes. So, I did not encounter much difficulty.

I participated in four different tourism sector symposiums and recorded and analyzed new models, concepts, and development trends shared by different experts from Solimar International, the World Bank, George Washington University, Tibetan Sangtse Ling Shambhala Tourism Group, and Tibetan Nomadic Norden Travel, etc. The opportunities were obtained through my internship hosting organization and other networks that were free and open to the public. These provided me an opportunity to expand my horizon on this sector.

I studied consented documents from Solimar International and its partners. They very generously shared cultural-heritage based tourism information and information on artisan development programs as a sub-tourism sector that supports rural artisans and their families and communities.

For the consented documents, I presented a formal consent letter which they reviewed. Then both parties agreed upon the terms.

Finally, I conducted one formal interview at Solimar International and another interview with a cultural-tourism development expert from the Smithsonian Institution. Both specialists candidly presented precious knowledge and insights from global and local perspectives.

I accessed abundant information about sustainable tourism and Solimar International with their generous support. I then digested the information thoroughly to articulate it in a clear, concise, and cohesive manner.

Data Analysis Methods

In analyzing the data, firstly I applied a comparative technique to process the Solimar approach and the geotourism approach. I highlighted information personally perceived as critical, difficult, or provocative, and studied it further and/or asked for the support of my colleagues and friends to assure my understanding. With the interviews, I carefully transcribed the audio recordings and analyzed the information presented and prepared the findings.

Secondly, I analyzed features of the Solimar sustainable tourism approach based on aspects of environmental responsibility, cultural responsibility, and synergic, and inclusivity of residents.

Finally, I organized the data from diverse sources. I reviewed the data, created memos, and identified themes. It was challenging to comprehend and articulate precisely on some of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

I used only publically available and consented information regarding this research. While seeking the information, I clearly explained the purpose and process of this research to interviewees and other stakeholders who generously offered their support.

In doing this research, I had some difficulties and hence sought guidance and support from friends. I relied on support that my advisor and others provided in many forms. It was hard to pull through when I encountered multiple unmanageable difficulties. It distracted the concentration and exhausted all energy every day.

Discussion

Sustainable tourism has been developed with positive intentions for development, learning, and wellbeing, but sustainable tourism needs not only good standards and principles but also pragmatism, accountability, monitoring, and other systems in place to serve geotourists and reliable service providers. Unfortunately, today's business community, academic community and other communities of higher classes of society still largely ignore local residents, their empirical knowledge, participation and ownership when designing development programs, including sustainable tourism.

From the studies, the indication is that tourism is a diverse and complex industry and the concept evolves as the market changes. Global tourism is important for the global economy and is rapidly now being developed in untapped regions and communities. Unfortunately, it is far too common that many communities are being exploited, marginalized and excluded from sustainable development planning that has a profound impact their way of life.

In respect to cultural exchange and visitations

There are several major tourism concepts that have evolved over the history of tourism. They range from explorative tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, geotourism, and sustainable tourism to experiential tourism, and include many further sub-divisions.

For economic development, tourism has been developed in most parts the globe. It brings opportunities and economic benefits to support livelihoods and local economies, while its negative impacts can include irreversible damage to heritage sites as well as sociocultural conflicts.

Safeguarding local people, their traditions, and the flora and fauna and climate of the region and globe is paramount, as these are the pillars that sustain wellbeing, the livelihoods of residents, geotourists and all stakeholders. An effective example of this is when Solimar International worked with Bhutan's Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs to ensure safe tourism practices are being thoughtfully and comprehensively planned. For instance, their plan towards increased tourism in Bhutan included, "an analysis and mapping of existing geographic and demographic data from the Gross National Happiness Commission and other sources, a series of workshops with members of the Royal Government of Bhutan, private sector representatives from the country's major industries, and leaders of development NGOs and conservation groups and a survey of the elected representatives of the country's 5,000 villages, conducted via mobile phone (Solimar, 2014)." This is a strong example of a comprehensive plan towards making sure respect to the local community and environment are the pillars of sustainable and respectful tourism.

One major potential the tourism industry can provide is multicultural experiences to connect all people through their differences and similarities. The industry needs multiculturalistic approaches with equity that bring unique and beneficial experiences to geotourists while providing economic opportunities to the local-residents through sustainable tourism.

Solimar (2014) stated that an integrated approach comprised of tourism specialists with long term commitment, continuous innovation and strong partnerships can help create more sustainable approaches to tourism. Solimar also participates in setting standards for the tourism industry in general to improve practices worldwide. As a professional sustainable tourism enterprise, it exhibits important capabilities of delivering viable practices to clients while maintaining high standards for ethical conduct.

In regards to creating standards, Solimar International (2014) stated that “through partnership with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, Solimar literally helped to define what it means to be sustainable in the travel industry. The GSTC Partnership launched the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria in October 2008.” Solimar wanted to have three specific features included, which are sustainability strategy, training programs, and codes of conduct to ensure best practices of tourism. Pushing for these was a significant development for having a concrete understanding of sustainability in the tourism industry and enabling firms to put the principles into practice, and more importantly by entering into these global standards there is an opportunity for the impact of the changes to scale worldwide.

The GSTC Criteria serve as the global baseline standards for sustainability in travel and tourism. The Criteria are used for education and awareness-raising, policy-making for businesses and government agencies and other organization types, measurement and evaluation, and as a

basis for certification. It has four pillars: Sustainable management, Socioeconomic impacts, Cultural impacts, and Environmental impacts (including consumption of resources, reducing pollution, and conserving biodiversity and landscapes) (GSTC, 2008).

GSTC was built from numerous practices and guidelines and standards around the world to have common criteria to safeguard sustainable tourism development. The criteria are the minimum requirements that all stakeholders should achieve in order to have holistic and equitable sustainable tourism development. That means they are not things that businesses could do to have a better impact, but they are criteria that businesses *must* do in order to have a basic level of sustainability then they can do more from there.

In 2010, Solimar International started a partnership with National Geographic Maps to improve participation of the involvement of local people in destination development. Geotourism MapGuides is a popular tool applied to over 20 destinations around the world to highlight the places and attractions most recommended and respected by locals. Through the sustainable Tourism MapGuide Program, they have a platform to convene local residents, enterprises and communities to tell their story of what's unique and authentic about their places. This approach is welcomed by residents and communities. They actively participated and contributed content to MapGuide and that greatly increased exposure and visitation of the destination. Especially the millennial geotourists of today seek to talk to residents and participate in locally authentic activities that contribute to their exploration and multicultural experience.

Through this study, I found that viable strategic planning is an essential part of sustainable tourism, and it must have the participation of the residents. Otherwise, sustainable management of the destination faces issues later on after project completion when the tourism

comes into conflict with local desires.

Current research by Solimar International (2017) states that the buzzword in today's tourism industry is experiential tourism. Visitors are no longer satisfied with simply purchasing a tourism product. Rather, they want vacations and activities that offer immersive experiences which connect them to the people, places and culture of the destination they are visiting.

This concept, known as experiential tourism, has been well researched over the past decade, and it has been proven that visitors who feel they are getting authentic and immersive experiences are willing to spend more, stay longer and visit again. This is important to the goal of using tourism to improve economic development in an area.

Although the modern tourism industry has developed over a period of close to forty years, and the principles and codes of conduct have been identified and improved noticeably, the impact of tourism development has yet to be fully measured, and the marginalization, exploitation and irreversible damages of its impact on indigenous communities around the globe remain issues yet to be resolved.

Tourism development has been rapidly developing in rural regions across the globe. Yet unfortunately residents have limited participation in the sector. Those areas are becoming mass tourism destinations rather than authentic experiences. This mass tourism overruns the community's capacity and damages cultural and ecological heritages, and it dismantles livelihoods.

Sustainable local tourism enterprise development is urgently needed to locate the businesses at the destinations to serve local economies. And rural sustainable tourism

development must have full equitable participation of local residents and their respectful heritages in a culturally-appropriate manner. One way to ensure this is by having a code of conduct. Solimar helps create codes of conduct to, “help visitors, residents, and service providers understand the behaviors and standards that they need to comply with to make sure tourism is not compromising the natural, environmental or cultural aspects of the community (Solimar, 2014).”

As a geotraveler adhering to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria of Sustainable Tourism, it is imperative to consciously make decisions in ways that support equitable practices and fair trade with respect to natural and cultural heritages. There are specific pragmatic guidelines and tips to become a Geotraveler and sustainable tourism practitioner. These criteria are not just for businesses, but for travelers and anyone involved in the tourism industry.

Learnings from the interviews

Through interviews, I learnt that contemporary sustainable tourism is still actively applied as an effective tool to address sustainable economic development in both poor and rich places across the globe. And sustainable tourism today presents new sets of challenges and opportunities. Some of the challenges are excessive commercialization, political divisions, and hatred of cultural diversity. These societal domestic and global problems are threats to sustainability, social well-being, and cultural democracy. But at the same time, it also brings opportunities for multicultural development and mutual understanding that enhances social health. Sustainable tourism today via digital platforms brings visibility and cultural participation that supports the economy and community development. And cultural heritage development is another growing sector within sustainable tourism, which attracts visitations with authentic and

clear presentation through storytelling and interactive engagement between host communities and visitors. The interviews allowed me to learn what it is like to promote sustainable tourism and create sustainable tourism enterprises.

Learnings from the tourism symposia

I attended the Tourism & International Development Colloquium at George Washington University. The colloquium sought to engage on current research between faculty, students and practitioners from research institutes, business groups, and universities. They had an interesting discussion on World Bank tourism initiatives and international development. I particularly paid attention to the presentation from the World Bank due to its well-known investment in the tourism sector in Asia that led to interventions that lack local input involvement. The tourism research presented was heavily based on literature and did not include participatory engagement of the residents and their heritages.

Cultural and Environmental Responsibility

Through examining the data on various programs, Solimar and stakeholders express that they value cultural and ecological heritage as cornerstone assets to the destinations and their businesses. They show a pursuit of authenticity, historic values, and development of cultural traditions at all destinations. And their business methodology is to discover the holistic nature and values of each heritage at destinations and apply their full collection of innovations in developing presentations with storytelling and structured strategy, management and marketing.

Another way they promote responsibility toward cultural and environmental resources that they apply is to mobilize and empower the full potential of local resources by forming

stewardship councils. This invitation of local residents and enterprises into the tourism chain allows for more local control of the tourism that takes place in a community.

Through the interview with Solimar, repeatedly the interviewee mentioned the importance of authenticity, strategic-marketing, and 360 presentation to provide experiential tourism. This shows that to make sustainable approaches to tourism work, you need to be able to communicate it well and market it to compete with more traditional tourism businesses. Throughout the symposia that I attended, the research presented mostly focused on building structure, strategy and management to produce maximum social wealth from the tourism industry coming into the community. The industry direction and market is built upon the conscious education ecosystem and education of the citizens. This will lead the industry in the direction of improving the impact that tourism has on the destinations and the communities there.

Synergy to create enjoyable tourism

Nowadays people that live in metropolitan cities and urban places don't have regular access to historic heritages and culture developed over time from living in close connection to a place. They also lack access to places where they can spend time in nature, but they want to visit those places where they can afford to have a different experience than city life. Solimar and its clients target specific markets where there are economic abilities to afford for visitations. This allows for both an enjoyable experience for the tourists, and makes it possible to ensure that sustainable criteria can be met.

Conclusion

This study explored sustainable tourism centering on Solimar International as a model

serving genuine sustainable practices for its stakeholders. This report is a case study with the object of producing and disseminating good tourism practices.

In this paper, I demonstrated that experiential tourism can have a transformative impact on geotourists while contributing to the development of an equitable tourism model for the place and people of the destination. As Solimar clearly states, “Sustainable tourism has tremendous potential. When done correctly, it conserves natural resources, celebrates cultures, alleviates poverty, empowers women, enhances education, creates jobs, and improves the well-being of local communities. For us it means continually challenging ourselves to think of innovative ways to tackle tough problems, and to celebrate places in exciting new ways.”

This research has been a transformative experience giving me a new understanding of sustainable tourism and its important frameworks, methodologies, standards and other complexities. Prior to this research my understanding of tourism was shallow and simply perceived as visitation to new places. Through the literature review, I learnt that sustainable tourism (ST) and community based tourism (CBT) are two similar approaches, but ST is mainly oriented towards long-term sustainability while CBT is targeting the local level. Dangi and Jamal (2016) proposed an integrated approach to “...sustainable Community-based Tourism.” One thing that was certain was the complex literature of the tourism sector. Through this research, I gained a new understanding of the abstract term of sustainability and about how to make sustainability happen in practice. Solimar presented some viable ways to achieve sustainability in the tourism sector. Sustainability may not have single definite definition, and even though its essence is about making things last longer, the core meaning may actually align with the Buddhist concept of impermanence, which may be perceived as the only sustainable thing in the

universe in its respective theory.

My understanding of sustainable tourism through this research is that it provides the most authentic experience to geotourists while in return reasonable compensation is made to the host community and service providers. In that effort, both hosts and clients have full responsibility to safeguard the destinations in all forms. And finally, mutually creating new knowledge and diffusion of that knowledge should be pursued to benefit social wealth and health.

The most important thing that I learned is that there are abundant ingenuities that exist in our life and often the hardest part is the management of people and their desires. Sustainable tourism should be positive and not as a means of monetization and exploitation of others and their futures. With this in mind, we can create multicultural experiences that provide value for both the people that are visiting a community and the community that is the destination.

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