Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica: Aligning Tourists’ Interests with Local Development

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Abstract
Sustainability in small communities preserves the natural environment while benefiting the lifestyles of community members by promoting human welfare. One quarter of Costa Rica’s export income comes from tourism, with ecotourism being the most prominent form of tourism. The field research of this study was conducted in the regions of Tárcoles, Carara National Park, and Jacó along the Pacific Coast in Costa Rica where tourists who visit other local attractions often bypass Tárcoles. It explored which services interest tourists, what activities tourists travel to Costa Rica for, and the sustainable services they are willing to pay for. Multiple surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were the methods for data collection. The analysis of the data suggests that there are opportunities in Tárcoles for the community to take advantage of the tourists visiting nearby attractions and develop sustainable services that preserve the environment and create economic benefits for locals.

Keywords
Ecotourism, Tárcoles, Carara National Park, Community-based tourism, Ethnography

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Sustainability in small communities preserves the natural environment while benefiting the lifestyles of community members by promoting human welfare. One quarter of Costa Rica’s export income comes from tourism, with ecotourism being the most prominent form of tourism. The field research of this study was conducted in the regions of Tárcoles, Carara National Park, and Jacó along the Pacific Coast in Costa Rica where tourists who visit other local attractions often bypass Tárcoles. It explored which services interest tourists, what activities tourists travel to Costa Rica for, and the sustainable services they are willing to pay for. Multiple surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were the methods for data collection. The analysis of the data suggests that there are opportunities in Tárcoles for the community to take advantage of the tourists visiting nearby attractions and develop sustainable services that preserve the environment and create economic benefits for locals.

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Introduction

Imagine staying at a sustainable, eco-friendly lodge after a day of bird watching, after which you have multiple restaurant options nearby from which to choose that feature locally sourced, socially and environmentally sustainable meals. For the eco-tourist visiting the small South American country of Costa Rica, this is not just a typical daily experience but a commonplace sustainable and environmental practice. Since the 1980’s, Costa Rica has been successfully hosting about one million tourists per year to experience its ecotourism industry. While there are many examples of successful environmental management systems that are executed by tourism and other hospitality companies worldwide (Editorial 2001), the challenge for many communities is striking a balance between environmental sustainability, preserving ecosystems, and promoting human welfare through economic development. One example is the community of Tárcoles along Costa Rica’s Pacific Coastline: many tourists bypass this region for the surrounding attractions of Carara National Park and Jacó. How can local community members and businesses offer sustainable tourism attractions that align with tourists’ interests?

This paper examines the ways in which small business development, sustainable environmental practices, and the interests of tourists can be aligned to benefit communities in Costa Rica in its ecotourism sector. I draw on a four-week field experience with the School for Field Studies in Costa Rica to show that there can be a reduction in the negative impacts of tourism on environmental systems with an incorporation of sustainable attractions based on tourist interests. In what follows, I illustrate how an emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable practices for Costa Rica’s tourism industry can allow its citizens to adapt sustainable tourism strategies that would be advantageous in small communities.

Background

With easier communication and global transportation, the tourism industry has greatly increased. As a result, when tourists and locals come together through tourism they have a chance to view how others live and reflect on their own lives through the eyes of another. Because of globalization, it is hard to imagine a future where tourism isn’t expanding to every part of the world. In many cases, tourism is a healthy and productive manner of sharing culture, beliefs, community values, and natural environment. Furthermore, there is often a reliance on tourism in communities that receive a high volume of tourists every year. In the tourism industry, some locals may interact as guides, performers, artisans, or in hospitality (Stronza 2001).

It is important to note that there are also negative effects on local communities because of the large numbers of tourists impacting the environment on an annual basis. For example: In the city of Tárcoles, the beaches are completely covered in trash that is being dumped into the ocean from the Rio de Tárcoles, carried downstream from cities upriver. Much of this trash
comes from large tourist resorts, where trash is carelessly dumped into the river. Because of situations like this, there is a need for alternate tactics to protect the environment. In a country such as Costa Rica, where most tourist visits target adventure or outdoor tourism, there is a need for alternative forms of tourism. Namely, sustainable tourism can prevent damage to beaches, the environment, and local communities.

In the same way, there are many benefits derived from ecotourism, such as increasing environmental education and consciousness, foreign exchange, jobs, and economic diversification (Koons et al. 2009). Ecotourism is defined here as a set of principles engaged in by the tourists such as traveling to natural destinations, minimizing impacts, increasing financial benefits for local people, respecting local culture, supporting human rights, and intentionally focusing on financial benefits for conservation (Honey 1999). Likewise, ecotourism can be very educational for tourists while increasing environmental awareness and cultural sensitivity (Stronza 2001). A surprising one quarter of Costa Rica’s export income comes from tourism, with ecotourism as its most prominent form (Braun et al. 2015).

Sustainable tourism requires a balance of interests between the host community, visitors, and the tourism industry (Erlet 1993). Additionally, depending on the type of tourist group, there is a difference in the type of facilities required, different levels of sustainable behaviors, and different required activities (Stoeckl 2008). For example, in order to benefit the community, tourism companies could purchase many of their required goods and services locally if those resources are available (Stoeckl 2008). Because of the variety of tourists’ expectations for travel, it is suggested that communities that want to attract visitors should focus on desired interest groups (Dinan and Sargeant 2000). Furthermore, if there is already a working tourist industry within the community, it would be beneficial for locals to take advantage of this existing industry and instead of competing, provide additional services to accompany this business to profit from the already-present flow of tourists (Stoeckl 2008).

There are some gaps in the anthropological literature with models and analytical frameworks that connect and eliminate problematic interactions between tourists and locals in the tourism environment. Stronza (2001) for example, suggests that we pose new questions in the anthropology of tourism that highlight the benefits associated with social, economic, and environmental profits of sustainable tourism. It is for this reason that there is a need to look at what motivates tourists to travel, where they choose to travel to, and how they are practicing tourism. The present article illustrates a study on tourists’ activities while traveling and their interests in sustainable tourism options in Tárcoles, Jacó, and Carara National Park, which are located along the Pacific coastline of Costa Rica. Carara Park is a frequently visited park and tourist attraction in Costa Rica. The park is about 12,950 acres and has many hiking trails and is an attraction for bird watchers (Carara National Park). South of the park along the coastal highway are the towns Tárcoles and the popular beach town, Jacó; Jacó has become a popular tourist destination because of its clean beaches, surfing, and shopping.

Method

My field study sought to discover whether a community’s interests in sustainability and tourism would align with tourists’ interests. To this end, the project was designed to discover if tourists would be willing to pay more for sustainable tourism. Would they participate in the sustainable strategies of local business owners or not? These questions led me to explore which services interest tourists, both local and foreign, within the Tárcoles, Jacó, and Carara Park area. I sought out which types of activities attract tourists to Costa Rica, types of services they will utilize while on vacation, and what sustainable services they’d be willing to pay for. My intention is to share with small communities, such as Tárcoles, what tourists are seeking regarding services and activities to determine which kinds of sustainable service options might be optimal for expanding community-based tourism.

I focused my primary research activities in Tárcoles and Jacó, and acquired additional survey and ethnographic data in Carara National Park, Manuel Antonio National Park, Quebrada Ganado, La Fortuna, and at the SFS Center in Atenas. The communities of Jacó and Tárcoles have popular tourist attractions, such as Jacó beach, local shops and restaurants, crocodile tours, birdwatching, and Carara Park (Figure 1). Tárcoles was my focus community because many tourists bypass the Tárcoles community to visit other attractions.

Since the research was conducted as part of the month-long student field school program I attended through the School for Field Studies (Figure 2), my research was confined to the Central Pacific Coast in Costa Rica. My data collection was constrained by my course research required by the field school and limited to a four-week timeframe and an already fully occupied schedule set up by the SFS program. Therefore, I was
unable to incorporate larger demographics, longer interviews, more specific surveys, and additional participant observation. My limited Spanish language skills meant that I had the ability to communicate in Spanish with tourists and Costa Rican locals at an intermediate level, and was able to collect survey data in Spanish and English. However, many of the lengthier interviews in Spanish had to be translated, and I could not conduct in-depth interviews.

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My data collection was conducted through a Tourism Activity Survey, a Tourism Interest Survey, and semi-structured interviews. The survey data was collected July 26th – July 30th, 2016. Surveys were collected in English and in Spanish and were targeted at both local and foreign tourists. A total of 88 surveys were collected, along with 5 semi-structured interviews, and one month of journal entries and notes representing my participant observation. As I was a student and tourist myself, I took notice of various sustainable tourism accommodations: restaurants, shopping centers, parks, lodging options, and tours. I particularly noticed when there were signs reflecting habitat preservation, locally sourced foods, locally made crafts, and places that offered recycling receptacles.

Results and Discussion

Keep Costa Rica Green. When asked about the primary reasons for traveling to Costa Rica, 90% of both locals and foreign tourists said it was because of natural beauty (Figure 3). During my month stay in Costa Rica,
where we visited many areas of the country, I took special notice of trash and recycling receptacles, signage posting conservation awareness for tourists, and restaurant and hotel strategies for sustainability. Initially, when I first arrived in San Jose and we took a large tour bus from the airport to the SFS Center in Atenas, I noticed trash littered along the roadside the entire way. Not only was there trash along the road, there was trash piled up in front of peoples’ driveways and spilling out of trash receptacles posted near the road waiting for pickup. I was shocked that Costa Rica was not the clean and green paradise I had always imagined it would be.

However, as we traveled to various places in the country, I noticed trash receptacles were just as prominent as recycling receptacles in all the city parks, hotels, and national parks. I noticed recycling receptacles in both Manuel Antonio and Carara National Parks, at the Mono Azul hotel in Quepos, in the city parks in La Fortuna and in Atenas, at Rancho Margot Eco-Lodge outside of La Fortuna (circa the Volcano Arenal), at La Selva Color Eco-Lodge, and consistently in every building at the SFS Center. Nevertheless, for a country that emphasizes its ecotourism sector, Costa Rica has some areas that do not represent perfect harmony between tourism and sustainability. As previously stated, most tourists travel to Costa Rica because of its natural beauty; because of this, there must continue to be an emphasis on sustainable tourism practices to protect the environment and the tourism industry.

**Hiking and Bird Watching Tours.** In my observations at both Manuel Antonio and Carara National Parks, there were many locals acting as entrepreneur tour guides. In both parks, the main attractions are unique wildlife and remarkable flora. According to the survey results, about 60% of tourists selected hiking tour guide and boat tours as services they would use while on vacation (Figure 6). When asked about what types of sustainable services they would be willing to pay for, over 90% of both foreign and local tourists said they would pay more for wildlife sanctuaries (e.g. national parks) (Figure 4). Moreover, for both types of tourists, hiking was their number one activity while in Costa Rica (Figure 5). In Manuel Antonio, the park doesn’t hire tour guides, but instead they are self-employed and receive payment directly from tourists for their guiding services and telescope/binocular use throughout the park. There were many guides on the trails, and many of them had established specific locations where they knew to take advantage of guaranteed wildlife sightings to impress tourists. Conversely, in Carara National Park, vendors and guides weren’t technically allowed to solicit services at the park, but one park official said they allow a few tour guides on the premises because they help the tourists through the park and increase the overall wildlife attraction visibility. Though these services are technically prohibited, tour guides were generally there every morning to attend to large tour bus groups and individuals interested in bird sightings or lengthy tours of the park. As a result, there were familiar sites made “off trail” where tour guides would take tourists for increased wildlife sightings. Because tourists are willing to pay more for national park visits, and they want to learn about local plants and wildlife, there is opportunity for parks to employ local guides that are invested in protecting the natural habitat and preservation of parks.
In an interview with a park official at Carara National Park, he mentioned that tourists are commonly interested in wildlife and learning about unique plants and animals at the park (Park official, 2016). This accords in part with the findings from the survey; the top three activities that both local and foreign tourists suggested they would most likely do, were: waterfall visits, hiking, and bird watching (Figure 5). Furthermore, about 30% more foreign tourists over local tourists said they would choose bird watching as an activity while traveling in Costa Rica (Figure 5). Because of the high volume of bird watching tourists, there is an economic opportunity for wildlife tourism in and around Carara Park. Though wildlife tourism is a new addition to ecotourism, it is defined as tourism that is related to nature, adventure, culture, and includes wildlife observation (Fennell 2015). There is an economic opportunity for different types of ecotourism and harnessing that opportunity can create an environment for small-scale entrepreneurs that could lead to larger economic growth (Miller 2012). Fortunately, there are plans to improve the park to attract more adventure tourists, make longer trails, and include mangrove trails for bird watching. The park official also mentioned that the park is aiming to develop an area for community outreach and to host classes for tourists and locals on sustainability and the importance of local development (Park official, 2016).

**Sustainable Tour Options.** In Costa Rica, there are a few local tourism companies in the region between Carara Park, Tárcoles and Jacó that focus on sustainability. Among these services are general tour services such as Green Path Costa Rica, where they support sustainable and eco-friendly tours in Costa Rica (Green Path founder, 2016). When the other students and I at SFS interviewed the owner of Green Path Costa Rica, she said their company focuses on environmentally conscious tourism, maintaining ecological friendliness, local sourcing, and wildlife protection. She said that Tárcoles became a popular tourist site twenty years ago because of the crocodiles in the Rio de Tárcoles. She said that Tárcoles needs to find something more prominent than just the crocodile tours to attract tourists (Green Path founder, 2016). In the surrounding areas, Jacó began to grow because of surfing and the more attractive beaches. Carara National Park began attracting students and researchers, and Tárcoles expanded from fishing for production to fishing for tourism opportunities (Green Path founder, 2016). However, tourists that travel to Costa Rica to visit Carara National Park and Jacó do not always visit Tárcoles. For the time being, there are ideas to implement more attractions that encourage tourists to visit Tárcoles from Carara National Park, such as fishing and a butterfly/hummingbird garden.

In the same way, Tárcoles attracts tourists for their various crocodile tour options; there are at least four different crocodile tour companies that take tour groups along the Rio de Tárcoles (Tour guide, 2016). In an interview with one of the Jungle Crocodile Safari tour guides in Tárcoles, he said that a large component of
their tours along the Rio de Tárcoles includes portions about nature preservation and a healthy habitat for the crocodiles. The guides are trained in protecting nature and the tours are aimed to teach tourists about the natural beauty and preservation efforts of the crocodile river. Their company purchases more expensive, but low impact, efficient boats for their crocodile tours. Similarly, the Jungle Crocodile Safari Company does not feed crocodiles, and they pick up trash in the river to assist in preserving the environment for the crocodiles. This coincides with laws to protect crocodiles; it is illegal to kill or feed crocodiles in Costa Rica. On the contrary, this is not necessarily the case with other crocodile tour companies, who often feed the crocodiles on tours to entertain their tourists (Tour guide, 2016). Protected areas are very important for companies that want to promote nature tourism; it is also how maximum biodiversity conservation is accomplished (Vaughan 200). When the tour guide spoke about the tourists, he said that they usually come to the Crocodile Safari in large tour buses, they take the tour up the Rio de Tárcoles, they visit the gift shop on site, and then following their agenda, they head to the next attraction outside of Tárcoles (Tour guide, 2016).

One of the reasons ecotourism is becoming one of the fastest growing area of tourism is because there is an increase in the number of travelers excited to take educational, nature and outdoor-based vacations (Wight 2001). According to the survey data, many tourists were interested in boat tours (Figure 6), and more than half of the total surveyed tourists said they would be willing to pay more for sustainable tours (Figure 4). Moreover, the 15-year tour guide for the Jungle Crocodile Safari, and lifetime resident of Tárcoles, believes that expanding on adventure fishing for young people would benefit the community (Tour guide, 2016). In Tárcoles, the cooperative of fishermen on the beach (Figure 7) spend part of their time fishing for export, and part on boat tours on the weekends with tourists (Fisherman, 2016). Fortunately, there are some working plans to develop a parking lot near the fishing cooperative to attract more tourists for fishing tours (Tour guide, 2016). There are tourists willing to pay more for sustainable tours, such as the eco-friendly Jungle Crocodile Safari. Additionally, there is an increase in the number of tourists interested in nature based tours, such as fishing at the cooperative in Tárcoles. Given these points, there is an alignment of interest between tourists and opportunity for the community of Tárcoles to offer nature-based, adventure tourism.

Sustainable Restaurants. My survey analysis revealed that most tourists use restaurants while on vacation and day trips, and many of them would pay more for sustainable restaurant services. In support of this, nearly 100% of tourists selected that they would use restaurants while on vacation, while over 80% said they would pay more for a meal at a restaurant if it were socially or environmentally sustainable (Figures 4 and 6). In an informal interview with the owner of a hotel and bar near Manuel Antonio National Park, I discovered some sustainable agendas of a local business owner. He
informed me that they only employ Tico’s (Costa Rican locals) at their establishment. They source locally (for the bar and restaurant) as much as possible because it is generally cheaper. They are currently growing mango trees on site for consumption. Also, in an effort to protect wildlife (and his mango trees), the owner of the hotel has strict rules for his guests that prohibit them from interacting with monkeys and other wildlife while staying at his establishment. If they are caught feeding the animals, as many other establishments allow, they are asked to leave (Hotel owner, 2016).

Similarly, in an interview with a restaurant owner in Tárcoles, she stated that business has been increasing for her, and that her business is from both foreign and local large groups. She also sources local seafood and produce when possible as it provides the best ingredients and is economically more sustainable for her business (Restaurant owner, 2016). For these reasons, it only makes sense for businesses to offer sustainable restaurant accommodations whenever possible, because it easily profits both parties. Similarly, most tourists are willing to pay more for a sustainable and locally sourced meal. Sourcing local ingredients can benefit the environment, local industries, the tourism industry, and assist restaurant owners.

**Gift Shops and Local Crafts.** Many tourists utilize gift shops while on vacation, and an equal number of tourists would be willing to pay more for local craft items if they were made sustainably. In fact, 70% of tourists said they would pay more for local crafts if they were offered sustainably (Figures 4 and 6). There are some local crafts available in Tárcoles and Jacó, such as Tico Pod, Fruity Monkey Poop, and some locals have sold handmade crafts made from recycled paper collected on the beach and in their homes. The owner of Green Path Costa Rica said that local art classes in the community of Tárcoles are often a tourist attraction; her daughter makes paper out of recycled plantain and banana leaves to sell as local crafts to tourists (Green Path founder, 2016). Many tourists that visit the Jungle Crocodile Safari tours in Tárcoles go to the gift shop on site, and then promptly leave with their tour group to other attractions in Jacó, Quepos, or Carara Park (Tour guide, 2016). Overall, there is an opportunity here for locals to take advantage of the local craft tourism industry made available by tourists attracted to the crocodile tours in Tárcoles. If tourists are willing to pay more for locally made crafts items, and they are already in Tárcoles for the crocodile tours, there is prospect for growth in businesses that offer local items, especially if tourists are willing to pay more for them.

**Sustainable Lodging.** Fortunately, over the course of a month I stayed at three eco-lodges and the SFS Center that had objectives to be sustainable. Products that were included for guests’ use were sourced locally and organically at all of these locations. Seasonal and local foods were brought in for our enjoyment, and there were recycling receptacles everywhere. At La Selva Color, where we stayed for almost a week, we were advised to conserve our towel and water use. At the SFS Center and at La Selva Color, warm water was not available. At the Center, we composted all of our food waste and harvested mangos, starfruit, and oranges from the Center’s orchards, and vegetables from the gardens.

Eighty-eight percent of tourists said they would use hotel services while on vacation, and 68% would pay more for sustainable hotel accommodations (Figures 4 and 6). A new ecotourism development can be a successful business venture if it unites the desired experience of the eco-tourist and goals for environmental sustainability (Gardner 2001). In short, developing local ecotourism accommodations (e.g. eco-lodges) can provide an educational resource for community members and improve their quality of life because there is an investment in preserving the natural landscapes, environment, and culture of the community. There is a need for lodging accommodations in the Tárcoles area, and based on the survey results there is opportunity to make them sustainable in accordance with tourists’ interests.

**Challenges in Costa Rica’s Sustainable Tourism Sector.** During my visit to Manuel Antonio National Park, I was astounded by the way tourists and locals engaged with the wildlife (particularly monkeys and raccoons) while in the park. We were told during our visits to the park that food was prohibited beyond the gates of the entrance. However, as we had student research access past the line of tourists and locals waiting to enter the park, I noticed many park guests with coolers and bags of food freely entering without their goods being discarded. At Manuel Antonio National Park, there are popular beaches within the park that many of the locals like to visit on the weekends, and there they bring lunches and day bags for the beach. While in the park, during the busiest times (usually afternoons), monkeys and raccoons were stealing food from tourists and local beach-goers. After which, trash was everywhere because it had been stolen or given to the animals. This is the
reason food was “prohibited” in the park, because it unfairly gave the animals expectations of food outside of food attained in their natural habitat. This was obvious when at lunchtime, the beach was filled with monkey’s eager to present themselves and put on a display for tourists so that they could acquire food. Though there were always signs posted about the importance of preserving the environment and waste management, tourists seemed to completely disregard them. There was a disconnect between what was ideal for the preservation of the parks and what actually happened during park visits. That is, locals know of the importance of protecting the habitat of the wildlife, yet they allowed their food to be plundered by animals in the park and allowed trash to be strewn along its beaches.

In Costa Rica particularly, there is an emphasis on keeping the country green and encouraging sustainable tourism to protect the natural beauty it offers. Yet many foreign tourists had no idea what sustainable tourism meant or how to practice it; many tourists didn’t even know the difference between sustainable tourism and traditional tourism. According to the survey results, 60% of locals and 50% of foreign tourists take vacations in Costa Rica because of sustainable tourism (Figure 3). Often during the survey collection, once I explained sustainable tourism, I could then ask questions about what they would be interested in spending money on and if they were interested in sustainable options. Most tourists said they would be more eager to buy local crafts than non-local products; they were interested in purchasing locally sourced food from sustainable restaurants, and willing to pay more for sustainable accommodations. Likewise, it seemed there was a disconnect between a country representing sustainability and what was available for tourists to purchase. There were many shops that had only imported goods, or the exact same gifts as other shops, and then a few that had handcrafted items. It seemed it would be difficult as a tourist to know the difference between gift shops that had only imported, non-local items, and gift shops that had crafts made locally and represented resident communities. As an example, in Jacó, one survey interview led me to a very different response then I was expecting. The individuals were not interested in filling out a survey to assist in Costa Rica’s sustainability, and they proceeded to tell me that they didn’t care about sustainable tourism, and they were only in Jacó because “you can get anything you want in Jacó.” These interactions provide a contradiction to what should be a sustainable future for Costa Rica. All things considered, it would benefit Costa Rica’s environment and its tourism sector to better promote sustainable tourism and educate tourists before and during their travels.

Conclusion

The community of Tárcoles along the Costa Rican Pacific Coastline has a few sustainable options for tourists, and most tourists are willing to pay more for these sustainable options. However, most tourists typically bypass this area and target other large attractions such as the neighboring Carara National Park and Jacó beaches. There are few hotel options in Tárcoles, and nearly all tourists said they utilize hotels on vacation, while most said they would pay more for sustainable hotel accommodations. Additionally, there is great opportunity for sustainable development in Tárcoles that aligns with tourists’ interests where there are tourists willing to pay for services and activities. Many tourists that target other communities or attractions would use services if they were offered locally and would pay the extra cost for sustainable options. Tárcoles would flourish under the expansion of organized, sustainable, community-based tourism.

This paper has explored what sustainable options tourists would be interested in paying more for, and acknowledged a general understanding of sustainability from the tourists’ perspective. Also, we can see how community members in Tárcoles can expand on the already existing tourism industry. When the tourism industry excludes the community from the planning process, it is harmful to the individuals in the community, the tourists, and leads to a conflict of interest (Singh 2004). This is significant because tourism is globally inevitable, and there must be an effort to reduce cultural and environmental damage from the impacts of tourism. With the tourists’ need and desire for craft goods, there is opportunity for local and handmade crafts. Likewise, with the tourists’ requirement for lodging, restaurants, and nature based tourism, there is opportunity to provide sustainable accommodations. There are many ways that small communities can take advantage of the available sustainable tourism industry, especially in an area like Tárcoles, where it is located near Carara National Park and tourists are already drawn to adventure tourism activities.

However, there is a disconnection between the efforts of a green country, such as Costa Rica, the locals who act sustainably, what tourists know about sustainable tourism, and how they practice it. Though many tourists would like to purchase locally crafted items, local food options in restaurants, and support sustainable lodging
accommodations, they often didn’t know what sustainable tourism was before they entered the country. Province and city officials, and restaurant and hotel owners know that they have an obligation to preserve the environment, because that is what draws tourists to Costa Rica in the first place. There is room for communities such as Tárcoles to develop sustainable options for tourists, but there is also room for education and global sustainability awareness.

Tourism is inevitably going to happen in small and large communities and countries everywhere due to the impacts of intensified globalization. In Costa Rica, tourism has become an essential income source, with most tourists visiting for natural beauty. Communities can make choices that impact tourism and their environment and how culture is shared. There are always going to be negative and positive effects from tourism, but reducing environmental harm and improving sustainable opportunities in local communities will have a beneficial impact. With the understanding that tourism is inevitable, choosing sustainable tourism should always be the obvious option.

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