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* Cover photo by Charles Watson.
Sustainable tourism in action: five success stories

This document profiles five major tourism businesses in Latin America that are working towards sustainability. Four hotels and one tour operator that have participated in the Rainforest Alliance’s sustainable tourism program present their main challenges and achievements, including their relationships with indigenous cultures, participation in community development activities, efforts to conserve biodiversity and their inclusion of local women in tourism initiatives.

We hope that their experiences will serve as an inspiration to tourism entrepreneurs and encourage them too to follow the path toward sustainability.
Jamu Lodge: Reducing Environmental Impacts and Supporting Local Development

A hotel with a 49-person capacity, Jamu Lodge is located in the Ecuadorian Amazon, within the Cuyabeno Wildlife Production Reserve (RPFC) – one of the most important lagoon complexes in Ecuador. Through community participation and discussions with local environmental authorities, the lodge was designed to function in harmony with the area’s biodiversity and to serve as an alternative to traditional tourism offerings.

In 2009, Jamu Lodge joined the Rainforest Alliance’s Best Practices in Sustainable Tourism Program, a move that has improved the operation’s management, according to owner Guillermo Gómez. The implementation of best practices has positively impacted the area’s natural resources, regional culture, employment quality, business performance and local livelihoods, all of which has led to economic development and biodiversity conservation.

The lodge first opened in 2001 – the fruit of a strategic alliance involving the hotel, the government and the local community – and it offers its guests comfortable surroundings and the incredible experience of staying in a remote jungle. The Equator runs through the RPFC, and the area features a range of ecosystems, including flooded and dry forests.

* Photos courtesy of the hotel.
Conserving Biodiversity

From a tourist’s point of view, Jamu Lodge was functioning well prior to the implementation of best practices, but the hotel’s participation in the Rainforest Alliance program brought with it important improvements, particularly with regard to the staff’s ecological training and awareness, and it has helped the hotel mitigate its environmental impacts. For example, wastewater had not been previously monitored or treated but now the hotel has installed biodigesters to treat wastewater.

The number of solar panels increased from two to five, generating 560 watts of power as compared to 110 watts previously. Paper and plastic waste are now separated from organic refuse whereas before all three were gathered and removed from the reserve together. The lodge also improved its housing infrastructure and replaced its wooden canoes with fiberglass ones, which are produced by the Cofán, a local indigenous community. Although these changes required an investment of approximately $28,000, they have led to significant savings. The solar panels alone have saved the lodge $1,200 per year.

As a result of the hotel’s sustainable management practices, customers have begun to develop a greater appreciation for conservation, which is reflected in their comments and suggestions. They urge the lodge to maintain its sustainable outlook.

“After experiencing our hotel, travelers develop an awareness of the importance of conserving the environment. Generally, they are well-traveled people who admire the fact that in Ecuador we are engaging in conservation, waste treatment and better practices, something that’s happening in other countries with more developed tourism industries.

Guillermo Gómez, Owner-Manager

The many changes have also enhanced the lodge’s image and created a shift in the attitude of its staff. With the adoption of best practices, employees now understand why procedures were changed. The results have been good for everyone involved: the company is conserving its place of business; employees are enjoying job stability; the community is benefiting from sustainability over the long term;
and clients are pleased by the high quality of service and the conservation of the ecosystems they are visiting.

Building a Relationship with Indigenous Communities

A space has been created to allow for visits by hotel guests to the local community, a result of Jamu Lodge’s good relationship with its neighbors. The goal is to teach tourists about the unique traditions and history of the indigenous cultures of Ecuador’s Amazon Basin, and it’s being achieved through activities such as the making of casabe (cassava bread, a staple of the community’s daily diet) and visits to their Shaman (spiritual healer).

For its part, the hotel supports the local community by offering loans for the purchase of canoes. The lodge finances the cost of a canoe, and the community member who receives it works off the loan. By creating jobs and hiring local people, the lodge keeps money in the community and earns the trust of its neighbors.

The relationship with the Siona-Secoya families has been strengthened through an agreement of mutual support and shared benefits under which half of the lodge’s eight permanent employees are from the area. This agreement has turned out to be very important because it establishes a strong employee-employer relationship and makes employees partners in the company – including, for example, the family that’s in charge of transporting tourists, a function that is vital to the lodge’s operation.

And Jamu Lodge also hires people from the Casabe community for a variety of services, including canoe excursions, guided tours and visits to the Shaman. The creation of jobs and the income they guarantee leads to local economic development. Previously, employees were only needed sporadically, depending on tourist demand; now there are a total of 12 to 13 fixed positions, including canoe paddlers, guides, administrative staff and support personnel.

“As a result of our employees’ renewed motivation and the pride they take in working at Jamu Lodge, we have been able to improve job stability and tourist security and provide a higher quality of service.”

Guillermo Gómez, Owner-Manager
Aventuras Tierra Verde: Improving Sustainability Performance

Aventuras Tierra Verde is a Costa Rican travel agency and tour operator that was created in 1995. The company offers a wide variety of tours, tour packages and multi-day programs, with tailored itineraries that promote environmental conservation and sustainable development throughout the country.

Since its inception, Aventuras Tierra Verde has strived to minimize its impact on the environment and local communities, but in 2007 the company’s managers felt the need to do a more effective job of delineating and formalizing their sustainability efforts. The connection they established with the Rainforest Alliance came at an opportune time, just as they were realizing that they needed outside guidance to help them become a more sustainable business. The process began with the basics: recycling and waste separation.

With the implementation of best practices for sustainable tourism, Aventuras Tierra Verde has improved the way it manages its operation and positively impacted the business, local communities and the environment.
Better Management Means More Than Better Business

As the company embarked on the process of Rainforest Alliance verification, the first step was to document its management procedures. This work began with the development of manuals for each department, including sales, purchasing and groups and guides. Though the standardization process was challenging, it was important to go through it for the reasons explained below. Next, the company developed its sustainability policies – laying out the business, social, environmental and cultural policies that would be used to run the operation as well as defining the company’s strengths, goals, values, mission and vision.

Aventuras Tierra Verda has placed a special emphasis on training, working with 40 people over a period of approximately 90 hours. The group included staff as well as suppliers and representatives from the community – the Mora canton of San José, where the company is based. Through training, it is improving the quality of employment for its workers and promoting community development and respect for local culture.

Among the topics covered in staff training sessions were: first aid, the handling of fire extinguishers, Costa Rica’s environmental laws, sexual harassment and abuse and the treatment of the disabled. The latter session was led by people with disabilities and attended by staff, chauffeurs and suppliers as well as members of the community and the local cultural center.

Other training events attended by community representatives and Aventuras Tierra Verde staff included sessions on indigenous cultures (their history and how best to show respect for their culture while supporting their economic development), cultural heritage, ratified international conventions and the trafficking of antiquities.

“Through training activities, the company has been able to incorporate first-hand knowledge into its operations. This helps us take the next step, which involves raising awareness and putting this new knowledge into practice. The training has helped us shape the internal policies that govern environmental, social, ethical and entrepreneurial issues. The development of these policies has been very important because they provide a more solid structure on which to base our sustainability efforts.”

Emilia Calvo, Head of Sustainability
The adoption of a sustainable framework has also led to improvements in administrative practices, including job security, purchasing decisions and the choice of suppliers. The company developed a map highlighting all emergency exits, posted signs indicating their location and is now working on an emergency manual. In addition, Aventuras Tierra Verde only hires drivers and transport providers whose paperwork and permits are up-to-date and guides who’ve been certified by Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT). When ordering supplies, preference is given to local vendors who operate in a socially just manner and with whom the company has a good relationship.

The company has also reduced its water and energy consumption through a few simple actions, such as turning off computer monitors and faucets when not in use, closing the refrigerator and turning on lights only when necessary. As a result, water and energy costs have also been reduced.

**Supporting Local Development**

Aventuras Tierra Verde developed a code of ethics that includes guidelines on how the company should behave towards the community. This work, carried out in collaboration with the Mora canton’s cultural center, has resulted in cleanups of the Pacacua and Quebrada del Maraño rivers in El Rodeo. The company and its clients also contributed US$2,000 to the project “A Roof for My Country”, which helps build houses for families in need.

And together with other organizations, including the ICT and PANIAMOR (an NGO that works to protect children’s rights), Aventuras Tierra Verde has signed a code of conduct to fight the sexual exploitation of young people.

**In Harmony With the Environment**

As part of its environmental management policies, the company has taken steps to mitigate its environmental impacts. It only buys ecofriendly products, such as paper made from sugarcane stalks, and uses software that aggregates all of its supplier information to facilitate online ordering, which –when coupled with the decision to do double-sided printing – has drastically reduced paper consumption. Similarly, the company asks suppliers to provide their information digitally; if they cannot, they are asked to offer only one printed copy.
Clients are told about Aventuras Tierra Verde’s good practices and are given recommendations on how to be responsible tourists: by being mindful of local flora and fauna, paying a fair price for what they consume, showing respect toward local people and following safety recommendations on trails. Before a trip, clients are sent a document with helpful suggestions that they can follow in their country of origin (leaving electrical appliances unplugged while they are gone from home) as well as during their stay in Costa Rica (turning off the lights in their hotel room when they are not needed).

The Benefits of Rainforest Alliance Verification

The goal of sustainability has led to big changes at Aventuras Tierra Verde, including significant investments that make it clear that the company is committed to the process. But there have also been significant benefits, including the creation of a valuable network from which the staff can learn and with which they can share information; the interest of European clients (thanks to the Rainforest Alliance verification’s global reach, which has enhanced the company’s marketing efforts); and the personal effects on individual staff members, who understand the importance of the changes.

“We must change the way we live. Our workers are replicating these practices in their own homes, altering their daily habits. . . and little by little, this is producing a big change in mentality.”

Emilia Calvo, Head of Sustainability
Thanks to sustainable tourism, there’s an even greater commitment to the environment. Wholesale customers were already demanding these kinds of changes, and they are happy about the verification. Earning the endorsement of the Rainforest Alliance has raised the company’s profile and increased its exposure (through participation in international fairs), which has helped it consolidate its gains and strengthened its appeal.

“The German market, for example, has been working on the implementation of sustainability practices for years, and it understands their value. It is a market that approves of social-outreach projects, and our efforts have been positively received.”

Emilia Calvo, Head of Sustainability
Hotel Las Colinas Arenal: Promoting Inclusiveness

Hotel Las Colinas Arenal is an ecofriendly family hotel with 18 rooms, located in La Fortuna de San Carlos, Costa Rica – just 10 minutes from the main observatories for the Arenal Volcano. Founded in 1989, it was the first hotel in the region aimed solely at tourists, and it has heartily embraced sustainability, earning four leaves from Costa Rica’s Sustainable Tourism Certification program and verification from the Rainforest Alliance in 2010. The biggest changes included infrastructure improvements, reduced energy and water consumption, a concerted effort to include women in the workforce and support for local development.

In 2008, for example, the hotel was remodeled according to the principles of sustainable architecture. The owners considered the use of sunlight, put in six solar panels to heat water for showers and kitchen use, installed a wastewater treatment plant that was engineered to prevent leaks; and designed rooms with large windows and light colors, to facilitate cooling.

Supporting Local Women and Fostering Sustainable Livelihoods

The hotel is a family business that is owned by Flor Fernández, and her daughter Ivette López is the general manager. Of the employees, five are women who are heads of their own households and two are men (the security guard and the reception-area attendant). In addition, the hotel offers training to women in the community who are not employees. In the words of its general manager, working in the
hotel “is like working with family,” a reflection of the fact that the staff is composed of people who have been with the hotel for many years.

The adoption of sustainable tourism practices has contributed not only to the development of the business but also to the lives of its female employees, who benefit from training, personal and business projection and personal fulfillment.

Training makes up a big part of the company’s commitment to sustainable tourism, enhancing employees’ job quality, raising awareness about the importance of being environmental and socially responsible and improving work processes, by teaching staff members to work together, be more efficient and communicate better. Fifteen training sessions were held from 2010 to 2011, contributing to local development and sustainable livelihoods by strengthening the skills of women in the community.

“Doña María worked with us for eight years; she received training and now works as a chef in the best restaurant in La Fortuna.”

Ivette López, General Manager

Improving Business Performance and Inspiring Others

Earning Rainforest Alliance verification has enhanced the hotel’s status as well as that of its owners, opening doors in the community and allowing them to be heard and respected. Once the verification was obtained, local people grew to appreciate Hotel Las Colinas, seeing it not just as another business but one that is leaving a mark in the field of sustainable tourism. For its owners and administrators, this has fortified their presence and legitimacy among community leaders, especially among women, who are now participating and taking leadership roles within the community, activities that were traditionally handled and shaped by men.

“I have come to meetings where I was the only woman. At first it was not easy, but things are different now; people recognize the name of the hotel and our names as individuals, and they pay attention to us.”

Ivette López, General Manager

The good wishes and support that the hotel has received – even from other hotel owners – serve as a source of inspiration for those small businesses that want to work toward sustainability. The positive response to their efforts fosters motivation
and job commitment among the women who collaborate with Hotel Las Colinas. Their identification with sustainable tourism has made them feel professionally and personally fulfilled, allowing them to work in conjunction with the hotel’s owners and the community without having to sacrifice the environment or local culture – thus leading to a better quality of life and economic stability.

“We believe that sustainable tourism is the only tourism that should exist because it is what best rewards people.”

Ivette López, General Manager

Furthermore, the hotel has also benefited economically from sustainable tourism practices, improving its finances by saving 10 to 50 percent on water and electricity costs as a result of training and monthly planning. And many clients have chosen the hotel because of its sustainable approach, even booking longer stays as a result. One of the perks of being a verified hotel is being listed on www.ViajeSostenible.org, an online directory of sustainable hotels that helps market these businesses to a targeted audience.

“The Rainforest Alliance’s support is like having a friendly hand to guide you down a long road, teaching you how to take advantage of your strengths.”

Ivette López, General Manager

Photo by Charles Watson
Supporting Local Development

General Manager Ivette López and her mother, the hotel’s owner, encourage collaboration with other businesses, schools, development associations and community representatives, working together on various initiatives, such as the Ecological Blue Flag program (which evaluates the environmental conditions of beaches and other tourism sites) and volunteer efforts at area schools.

With respect to the La Guaria school, Ms. López and Ms. Fernández began by publicizing the educational center’s needs. They connected with ten students in the United States and 40 in Canada who traveled to the school to paint classrooms and plant a garden that was designed to prevent the entry of livestock. They also donated 300,000 colones (approximately $US 582) worth of educational materials and helped developed cultural exchange programs for the children.

The women of Hotel Las Colinas have also worked on conservation initiatives with the Boy Scouts of La Fortuna and the Canoa Aventura tour operator, including the planting of 500 trees donated by the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) and the reforestation of land along the banks of the Peñas Blancas River.

Photo by Charles Watson
Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat: Improving Livelihoods

A family operation dedicated to rainforest conservation and community solidarity, the Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat strives to offer its guests an unforgettable ecotourism experience. The hotel is located along the Sarapiqui River in Costa Rica and features seven rooms (14 beds). The property covers 54 acres (22 hectares) – 49 acres (20 hectares) of which are secondary forest.

The managers of the Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat have followed the Rainforest Alliance’s Guide for Sustainable Tourism Best Practices since the hotel’s inception, implementing numerous measures designed to minimize environmental impacts and maximize benefits to the local community. These measures include the installation of seven solar panels (to light rooms) and low-energy fluorescent bulbs, a water and energy-saving campaign aimed at clients and staff, rainwater catchment, waste separation for recycling, a craft shop that features only local handicrafts (which generates an income of approximately US$100 per month for area artisans) and the hiring of local people (100 percent of the employees are from the community).

As a result of its respect for the environment, responsible use of resources and commitment to local development, the Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat has been rewarded with the community’s acceptance and a positive social and natural environment.
Fostering Local Development and Sustainable Livelihoods

The hotel promotes the purchase of food and supplies from local producers, and the community has become one of its major suppliers. This connection benefits the local economy, fosters a trusting relationship with neighbors and creates a positive atmosphere at the hotel, encouraging discussions with tourists on subjects such as agriculture. The openness that visitors experience inspires them to become familiar with the neighboring area, through tours led by local people. (Fifty percent of Chilamate’s guests visit the community, tour local homes, gardens and farms and get to know the families.) As a result, tourists buy items directly from the community and learn about the local culture.

The Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat also actively participates in a number of community welfare projects designed to promote local development. The hotel and community have worked together on security issues, a strategy that has benefited both. The hotel also invited the Ministry of Security to take part in the Community Safety Program and recruited 10 area residents to participate in training and the development of a local security code.

“The community cares for us and we care for them; this gives us a sense of peace and security.”

David Azofeifa, Owner

The growing bond between the hotel and its neighbors highlighted the need to organize a community-level entity that could oversee local development. A development association was formed, led by one of the hotel’s owners, and this has resulted in projects that have improved community infrastructure – for example, repairing streets and points of access for the community; electrical work (previously, there had been no public lighting); and the development of plans to construct a community center. The association also organizes social activities for local children at the end of the year.

Additionally, the hotel is helping to link tourism with community outreach by the attracting tourists and students (foreign and local) who want to do community work in the town. The hotel offers volunteers a discount on lodging and coordinates their interactions with the local school and women’s group. In the first five months of 2011, six volunteers participated in community projects.
The volunteer activities help make education available to minors in the community. Volunteers assess the children’s educational level, identify those kids with the greatest need and manage scholarships for their pursuit of high school studies. These scholarships cover transportation to an educational center in Sarapiquí, lunch and teaching materials—totaling $300 to $500 (depending on the course level and distance from the student’s home to the center). Volunteers also help teach English and environmental studies. These initiatives are all vital because the area has a very high dropout rate.

Another way that the Chilamate Rainforest Eco Retreat contributes to the education of the area’s young people is by making its reception desk computers available to students on Saturdays, allowing them to access the Internet and do their homework. The hotel is also working on a plan to set up computers exclusively for student use in the future.

The hotel has worked with schools in three communities: Linda Vista, Chilamate and El Roble. At the Linda Vista school, it helped install sanitation services, including a septic tank and drainage system, to replace the existing latrine, and paint classrooms, walls and the dining room, investing approximately US$1,000 in materials plus a large number of man-hours. With an additional investment of about $3,000, the hotel also built a plant nursery at the school, and a work plan is being drawn up for how the nursery will be managed.

At the Chilamate school, the hotel’s owners are members of the board of education and the school board, with whom they’ve worked to repair the school playground and establish a sports field and multi-sport center, among other things. This work came out of another investment of approximately $6,000.

As part of its commitment to the environment, the hotel also helps with the maintenance of the school’s wastewater treatment system, periodically checking on the water pump and bathrooms. Preventive maintenance is performed, and if there are any leaks, repairs are made. The person doing these tasks is a hotel employee who visits the school monthly, during which time he checks the system and keeps a logbook detailing all repairs, to show that costs can be kept low and included in the school’s budget.

At the El Roble school, the hotel works with the school’s environmental education program and supports the efforts of the board of directors and school board to construct a library, which is now 70 percent completed. The hotel is currently seeking book donations.
Support for Conservation

The community views the hotel as a kind of conservation project, not just because of its vision statement and mission, but also because of its actions.

“…Provide visitors, friends and the community with an example of hope and change via sustainability projects and cultural experiences that raise environmental awareness, as a way of achieving a better quality of life and widening the path for conservation…”

Vision of the Chilamate Rainforest Eco-Retreat

A clear example of this vision is the way that the hotel conveys its values to farmers who live in Agrarian Development Institute (IDA) settlements. These farmers do not have legal deeds and must go through the process of obtaining title to their land; as a result, many of them end up selling their farms. To help address this situation, the hotel’s owners have spoken with these farmers and transmitted an appreciation for the land as well as passing on their knowledge about soil, water, alternative crops and sustainable development proposals.

The Results Speak for Themselves

“Our success is measured by the acceptance of the community and the fact that we’re surrounded by many friends.”

David Azofeifa, Owner

The hotel’s work with area schools has produced several benefits. The most significant is its positive impact on the children, but it’s also created a positive atmosphere around the hotel and resulted in the training of young people who now have the potential to become businesspeople with links to the hotel.

Student volunteers who participate in two- to three-month sustainable tourism internships often become future clients; not only do they spread the message of sustainable development but they are also inspired by the realization that they could establish and run a lodge with their own families in the future. In exchange for the accommodations that are offered by the hotel, volunteers have designed a website, applied their excellent marketing skills and provided training on decor and food handling, all while passing on their personal knowledge, energy and motivation to the hotel’s staff.
The work that went into implementing sustainable tourism practices has produced positive returns for the hotel – helping to fill its rooms and creating a network of donor families and volunteers who promote the property via word of mouth. The commitment of its visitors helps to create a chain reaction that leads to community involvement and encourages donors who weren’t initially users of sustainable tourism services to visit the hotel.

“The marketing that we’re able to do because of our sustainable tourism practices is more effective than simply working hard to please guests and make a good impression. The commitment that we feel from sustainable tourists helps open the door to success. Our appeal stems from making the decision to become a responsible company.”

David Azofeifa, Owner

The Rainforest Alliance’s support has been very important. Though the hotel’s owners already knew they wanted to pursue sustainability, the Rainforest Alliance provided the guidance, workshops, materials and oversight that helped them maintain their focus and remain true to the goal of best practices.

Sustainable tourism is a continuous process, requiring daily effort, and it allows positive results to arise in an organic way. When you are committed to the environment and best practices, you improve quality of life, become filled with a sense of peace, and get to know some special people, who are happy and successful.

David Azofeifa, Owner
Maquenque Eco-Lodge:
Improving a Community’s Quality of Life

The Maquenque Eco-Lodge is located in Boca Tapada de Pital de San Carlos, in Costa Rica. It was established in 2009, within a 148-acre (60-hectare) reserve, as a way to help conserve wildlife, and the hotel offers visitors a travel experience far from city life, immersing them in silence that is only interrupted by the sounds of birds and other rainforest fauna.

With its 14 rooms and 23 beds, the hotel provides high-quality accommodations for visitors who want to be surrounded by a tropical forest and the majestic San Carlos River as well as for those who seek adventurous activities that are in harmony with the flora and fauna of the region. The hotel has access to the new Maquenque National Wildlife Refuge, which is 148,000 acres (60,000 hectares) in area.

“The hotel was built because we wanted to make the most of nature; my five brothers and I are all naturalists and when our father gave us the land, we decided not to split it up, instead embarking on a joint project that would allow us to offer nature-lovers a little bit of paradise. What we want is to protect life.”

Oscar Artavia Munguia, Owner

Following the 2009 economic crisis, traditional cattle ranching and farming activities in the area were deeply affected, and tourism was viewed as an
income-generating alternative; that was when the hotel, began operating and contributing to community development. It accomplishes the latter through:

- Job creation
- The purchase of food and supplies from local producers
- Training and community outreach
- The protection of the region’s biodiversity and efforts to make the area a tourism destination – which help conserve 168 acres (68 hectares) of primary and secondary forests and wetlands.

**The Creation of Quality Jobs**

Since the hotel’s inception, its founders have been committed to benefitting the community through job opportunities, employing local people to work on construction projects and in guest services. Of the 135 people who have been involved in construction, 50 percent hail from the area.

In addition, from November to April the hotel offers full-time employment to nine people from Boca Tapada, five of whom are women. During the low season, these folks work part-time but receive full job benefits including minimum wage, bonuses, insurance and vacation time. Area residents are also hired to repair and maintain the rooms and furnishings.

**Building Local Supply Chains and Becoming More Self-Reliant**

The hotel buys most of its supplies from local producers and stores, invigorating the region’s economy, purchases regular consumer items at Boca Tapada’s two supermarkets. Other goods, such as eggs, are bought from a local women’s association, thereby creating sustainable development opportunities for the members of the group.
And when it comes to daily consumption, the hotel also strives to sustain itself through the cultivation of its garden. Seventy-five percent of what is harvested is consumed.

**Training and Community Outreach**

The Maquenque Eco-Lodge has implemented a training strategy for its employees and community members, not only because of the services these people provide for the hotel but also as a way of contributing to their personal lives. In conjunction with the National Learning Institute, six training sessions were developed during the hotel’s first year of operations, covering food handling, bartending, cooking, first aid and CPR, pool maintenance and computer software programs.

The hotel’s training initiatives are more than just a way of giving people the skills they need to perform their jobs; they also provide educational opportunities for community members who have not earned academic degrees.

The drive to attract student volunteers from Canada is another example of how the hotel helps the community. The volunteers collaborate with area schools to organize soccer matches with the students and share their experiences and stories over lunch in the cafeteria. In addition, the hotel has designed a project to help local schools by working with the volunteers to assess the school’s needs and secure donations that go toward the purchase of desks, supplies and equipment.

**Protecting Biodiversity and Promoting a Tourism Destination**

The hotel is beginning to develop new sustainable initiatives as well. Among them is a plan to encourage the growth of the langoustine population, a species that has been very popular in the area but that is dying out because of overharvesting. The hotel plans to reuse water from the production lagoon and release those langoustines that have the best chance of survival into local rivers. The langoustines will supply the hotel’s kitchen and be served to clients, but they will also be used to educate: students will be invited to witness their release into the rivers and attend talks on the importance of their conservation, the impact that the species’ disappearance would have on the area and the need to protect female langoustines during the reproductive season.
“It’s possible to create a successful project that focuses on sustainability.”

Oscar Artavia, Owner

As Artavia points out, Boca Tapada is likely to face the same challenges as the rest of the world, with regard to growth and deforestation. He believes that the only way to protect nature, forests and wildlife from these threats is through sustainable tourism. A hotel like Maquenque can be built anywhere around the globe, but the focus on sustainability is what differentiates it and attracts the kind of people who enjoy nature, appreciate quiet places and take pleasure in the attentive treatment they receive as they enjoy a harmonious retreat with family and the local community.

The hotel is also doing its part to help make the area a tourism destination. According to Artavia, efforts are already underway to promote the region, in collaboration with three other local hotels.

“The Rainforest Alliance has helped us organize ourselves and clarify exactly what we have to do to be sustainable and environmentally friendly. It’s like having a car but not knowing how to run it, so the Rainforest Alliance comes in and teaches you how to drive.”

Oscar Artavia, Owner
The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.

This work was possible thanks to: