

Spring 2016

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Kleszczynski, Kimberly A., "Impacts of Ecotourism in Costa Rica: A Sustainable Alternative to Conventional Tourism" (2016). *Pell Scholars and Senior Theses*. Paper 106.
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Impacts of Ecotourism in Costa Rica
A Sustainable Alternative to Conventional Tourism

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Spring 2015

Aim and Scope of Project:

Costa Rica's landscape has fascinated travelers for centuries, establishing Costa Rica as a popular tourist destination (Hintzen 2014). Costa Rica is known as one of the premier sites to study and experience high-altitude tropical cloud forests and nature conservation (Forsyth, 1988; Caufield, 1991; Budowski, 1992; Morrison, 1994; Aylward et al., 1996; Baez, 1996; Honey, 1999; Burlingame, 2000; Nadarni & Wheelwright, 2000; as cited in Vivanco, 2006). Since the 1970s and 1980s, Costa Rica has emerged as one of the most prominent nations for nature conservation and ecotourism (Honey, 1999; Vivanco, 2006). This paper will discuss the foundation of sustainability in ecotourism, examples of unsustainable development through conventional tourism, the country's commitment to prevent "green washing" through their Certification for Sustainable Tourism, and the economic benefits of tourism as a whole. This paper aims to demonstrate that ecotourism, when implemented correctly, is a superior alternative to conventional tourism and should be prioritized for Costa Rica's future development.

This ethnographic project examines the economic and social influences of tourism, specifically ecotourism, on the local communities of Costa Rica. The proposed research seeks to investigate the effects of ecotourism on the environment and quality of life for residents in Costa Rica while demonstrating the importance of sustainable development in relation to the ecotourism sector. The primary purpose of this research is to view the impact of ecotourism on Costa Rican society, with a particular focus on culture, economics, the environment, and specifically from the perspectives of local Costa Rican residents. Ultimately this paper will define what ecotourism is and what it means to Costa Rica. The proposed research will explore the following questions: (1) How does ecotourism and sustainable development relate to one another? (2) How do the impacts of conventional tourism compare to those of ecotourism? (3)

How does ecotourism effect the Costa Rican environment and its wildlife? (3) How does ecotourism affect the economy and quality of life for Costa Rican residents? (3) What impact does ecotourism have on the country's culture?

Literature Review

Costa Rica occupies 0.035 percent of the world's landmass but contains five percent of its biodiversity with twelve thousand species of plants, 1,239 species of butterflies, 838 species of birds, 440 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 232 species of mammals, which dwell among its picturesque rainforests, volcanoes, mountains, beaches, mangrove forests, and cloud forests. Costa Rica's biodiversity has fascinated travelers for centuries, establishing the country as a popular tourist destination (Hintzen, 2014). Costa Rica is known as one of the premier sites to study and experience high-altitude tropical cloud forests and nature conservation (Forsyth, 1988; Caufield, 1991; Budowski, 1992; Morrison, 1994; Aylward et al., 1996; Baez, 1996; Honey, 1999; Burlingame, 2000; Nadarni and Wheelwright, 2000; as cited in Vivanco, 2006)

Ecotourism is part of a broader category of alternative tourism which sprouted in response to negative environmental impacts of mass tourism (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; as cited in Gray & Campbell, 2007). Ecotourism involves visiting environmental areas that are protected by governments, conservation or scientific organizations, or private business owners. The definition of ecotourism selected specifically for this paper is "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people" (Garen, 2000: 221; as cited in Dasenbrock, 2001). Another definition comes from The International Ecotourism Society, which describes the

activity as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”(TIES, 1990; see TIES, 2014).

Still, the definition of ecotourism has been misconstrued in the past. For example, the travel industry frequently classifies ecotourism with nature or adventure tourism. Ecotourism has also been referred to as “responsible,” “sustainable,” “green,” or “low impact” tourism and has even been erroneously called “pro-poor tourism” or “geotourism.” The confusion over the definition is due to the involvement of many disparate institutions throughout its historical foundation, specifically scientific, conservational, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral aid institutions, developing countries, and the travel industry (Honey, 2008). Essentially, there are a variety of definitions for the term “ecotourism;” however, in order for a tourism location to be considered ecotouristic, it must commit to mitigating negative environment, social, and economic impacts in the areas surrounding the site. These three pillars construct the model for sustainable development; ecotourism and sustainability go hand in hand.

Many protected areas around the world, including those in Costa Rica, have been modeled after the U.S National Parks System, which preserves specific areas of land and the specialized natural resources of the area. Costa Rica’s interest in environmental protection began in the 1960s and ecotourism boomed in the mid-1980s after the U.S War against Nicaragua and an attempt at USAID’s free-trade and privatization policies (Hintzen, 2014; Honey, 2008). However, the Costa Rican government had discussed environmental protection as early as the 1930s (Hintzen, 2014). Scientists and environmental activists in Latin America were concerned about the logging, farming, and human settlement which were contributing to Costa Rica’s environmental degradation - threatening local flora and fauna (Hintzen, 2014; Honey, 2008; Radulovich, 1988; Thrupp, 1990; as cited in Vivanco, 2006). According to Martha Honey

(2008), people will protect what they receive value from. She refers to this as the “stakeholder” theory, which coincides with economic development theories of poverty stricken communities (Honey, 2008). As a result of much community outcry and the influence of environmental education and awareness from dedicated tropical biologists, the congress of Costa Rica passed a forestry bill in 1969 which created a system of 20 parks, protecting twenty-five percent of the country’s land mass and its biodiversity (Hintzen, 2014). Today, Costa Rica’s forests cover 52% of the country’s land area (see Figure 1).

With the system of parks in place, Costa Ricans soon realized the potential capital that they could gain from tourism. Between the 1970s and 1990s tourism doubled with the contraction of hotels, restaurants, resorts and stores near the local parks. Nevertheless, there are

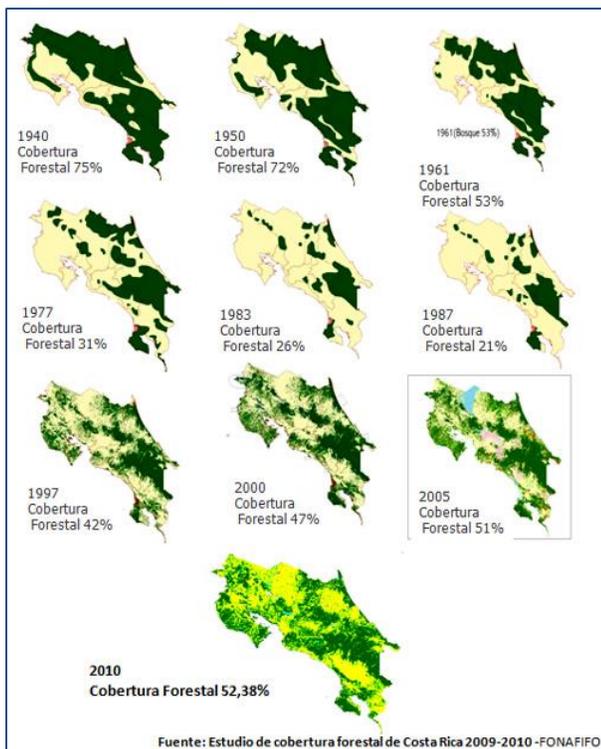


Figure 1: Costa Rica’s percent of forest cover. Severe degradation until 1981 with a 100% increase to 52% forest cover in 2010.

still environmental and economic problems in Costa Rica despite the creation of the national park system. The country’s pineapple, banana, and cattle industries continue to cause serious environmental problems and many ecotourism companies are interested in making a profit rather than protecting the environment (Hintzen, 2014; Dasenbrock, 2001); the negative effects of coffee production have decreased due to new sustainable methods of farming. Conventional tourism, and even nature tourism, often fails to provide widespread economic benefits and many scholars suggest that little to no revenue reaches local

residents (Healy 1994; Jacobson & Robles 1992; McLaren 1998, as cited in Stem et al. 2003).

Many nations promote ecotourism in order to generate income and promote environmental conservation with the hope that tourist dollars can generate income for local populations and funding for protected areas (Hearne, 2002). Brandon (1996; as cited in Stem et al., 2003) suggests that ecotourism promotes conservation and provides an incentive for private conservation efforts; however, Stem, Lassoie, Lee, & Deshler (2003) propose that successful ecotourism initiatives may draw higher numbers of travelers, thus increasing negative environmental impacts such as increased solid waste generation, habitat disturbance, and forest degradation from trail erosion. According to Harold Goodwin, (1996; as cited in McKeone, 2011, p. 9) “tourism is now the world’s largest industry and it has an increasing impact on protected areas. Our understanding of these mechanisms, their ecological impacts, and our capacity to manage tourism in protected areas” lags behind the time sensitive effects of the growth of tourism on protected areas.

Tourism has a variety of implications, not only environmentally, but socially as well. According to Robert Hearne (2002), Costa Rican families tend to visit national parks and eco-attractions during weekends, whereas foreign tourists plan their visits during the week. In general, Costa Rica has been very successful in marketing its nature-based tourist attractions and in providing tourist packages that meet international demand while sustaining the quality of the environment (Hearne, 2002). In many cases, the logic of ecotourism is to take facts about the world at large, decontextualize and reduce these ideas, and rearrange them to create a certain message about a specific environmental or nature oriented attraction. On occasion tourists come out of these attractions disillusioned because most realize that these attractions are merely a ploy to acquire tourists’ money (Vivanco, 2006); this concept is commonly known as greenwashing.

Ecotourism has also supported the rise of volunteer tourism, a type of alternate tourism in which tourists volunteer in an organized fashion to help alleviate poverty, restore environmental areas, or to conduct social or environmental research (Gray & Campbell, 2007). In a case study of volunteer ecotourism and sea turtle conservation in Costa Rica, Noella Grey and Lisa Campbell (2007) concluded that many participants of volunteer tourism place a strong emphasis on a lived experience of working within nature or a specific community while feeling involved and useful. Many of the tourists are aware of economic benefits of their presence because the volunteers do work and spend their money locally. There are other ideas that insinuate that tourist money decreases a community's ability to be economically independent. Even though there was a volunteer component to this study, the work of sea turtle conservation coincides with the work of ecotourism (Gray & Campbell, 2007). According to Ben Sander (2010), "tourists do not fully realize the effect they are having on their surroundings because education of tourists is often left out of ecotourism practices." He concludes that more education should be incorporated into ecotourism programs so that tourists can learn about the culture and biodiversity of a specific area (Sander, 2010). In her article, Ellen Puccia concluded that "the tourist industry in Costa Rica will continue to thrive in future generations, evolving to meet the needs of ever-increasing numbers and varieties of tourists" (2009, p. 104).

The need to contribute to the family's economic security motivates many Costa Ricans to seek jobs in the employment opportunities of ecotourism (Elijah-Mensah, 2009; Ladkin, 2011; Veijola, 2009; as cited in Himmerlgreen et al., 2012). However, there are harsh realities of tourism and rapid development of impoverished countries. Eric Nost suggests that the proposed projects for further development in Costa Rica have caused tension between locals and foreigners due to the locals' concern for the loss of their area's originality and character, while

other residents support the opportunity for future employment opportunities (Nost, 2013). For example, in his study of Hawaiian men and their struggle to regain their masculine identity after dramatic societal change due to colonization and the tourist industry, Ty P. Kāwika Tengan found that the majority of Hawaii's population feels that the islands are being run for the benefit of the tourists at the expense of the locals (Tengan, 2008).

Rapid urbanization and colonization has implications for migrants, the urban poor, and society at large. Those who are unable to sustain themselves in the new, tourist driven economy move to slum areas, contributing to environmental degradation of the surrounding areas due to absence of sufficient drainage and garbage disposal systems – environmental destruction that ecotourism seeks to prevent. In addition, competition over scarce basic resources, such as clean water or electricity, leads to increase social tension and conflict within the slums (Rabab et al., 2014). David Himmerlgreen et al. (2012) add that rapid economic changes have both positive and negative consequences for nutrition and health. In their study of the Monteverde zone of Costa Rica that has recently undergone a rapid economic shift from a primary agricultural to a mixed economy based primarily on tourism, David Himmerlgreen et al. (2012) found that participation in the ecotourism workforce may be associated with food insecurity and negative health complications such as obesity and the rise in diseases like hypertension and type-2 diabetes. “Inadequate transportation, poor roads, being off the beaten track, and nonparticipation in food cooperatives pose potential barriers of achieving food security” and the new attraction to employment in the ecotourism field has resulted in dietary delocalization, whereas local community are relying on more processed, starchy, imported foods (Leatherman and Goodman 2005; as cited in Himmerlgreen et al. 2012, p. 359). Through his ethnographic research carried on over three years in Caño Negro, Costa Rica, Javier Escalera Reyes (2013) suggests that the

idea of conservation and sustainable development and the involvement of local communities hold significant deficiencies because it contributes to the existing inequalities within society. I hope to identify these deficiencies within my research.

Research Description and Methods

Ecotourism has a plethora of positive and negative impacts on the quality of life in Costa Rica. It is safe to say that much of the literature is provided from an outsider's perspective of ecotourism in Costa Rica. As described in Bernard H. Russell's "Participant Observation" (2006) the goal as a participant observer was to acquire as much insider information from the locals as I possibly could about their experiences and incorporate them into my finished product as to mimic the works of Emily McKeoneⁱ (2011) and Ty P. Kāwiaka Tengan (2008). The local residents have stories of the effect of tourism on their quality of life in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Costa Rica has a strong reputation as a tourist destination and, increasingly, its economy has been fueled by tourism, making it an ideal site for research. My goal for this project is to build upon past research done on the impacts of ecotourism on Costa Rica, specifically from gathering data from the perspective of residents who participate in or are affected by the ecotourism field in various areas around Costa Rica. I want to gain a perspective on how the industry has affected the lives of the men and women, who work in the tourist industry, hoping to understand if their jobs in tourism have had any impacts on their lives, specifically their economic conditions. From gaining an understanding of the living circumstances of, I hope to find out more information on how ecotourism impacts the environment both positively and negatively. My research primarily consists of two types of empirical research: (1) participant observations and (2) interviews.

Participant Observation

Quality participant observation data is necessary for the success of this project. I began participant observation upon arrival in San Jose Costa Rica. The key players in the ecotourism field may include, but are not limited to, environmental activists, local residents, transportation employees, employees of national parks, tourism companies, and the natural environment. One purpose of participant observation is to observe the structure and function of a variety of ecotourist locations. I to identify how different sites compare to others. It is not only important to acknowledge the tourism system, but how this system affects the wildlife in the environment, the education of the locals, and how tourism has shaped the culture over time. Next, I reflect upon my experiences with and observations of conventional tourism sites, or even nature tourism sites, to my experiences with ecotourism sites.

I looked for key information in the mission and how environmentally friendly a specific site is by looking at what material is provided by tour guides, the quality of the exhibits, and what information is provided inside pamphlets and ads. I also read blogs and articles about various tourism sites within the country. The point of visiting ecotourist sites is to understand how the visitors and employees conceptualize their experience. I conceptualize my own experience, as well as other visitors', when visiting a particular site. Does a site market more on their social media account than they actually offer? Do the pictures parallel to what the site actually looks like? Are tourists impressed or disappointed in their experience? Are there non-ecotourism sites that may be more ecofriendly than an actual ecotourism site? Even on a larger scale, how does Costa Rica's reality compare to how the country markets itself as a whole? These are all questions that I explore in my observations while participating in a tourist experience.

My own experience at Veritas University and my environmental classes informed the results and analysis in this thesis. Through my class fieldtrips, I observed how ecotourism sites interact with the environment and especially their local communities, specifically, how a particular site supports the growth and education of its surrounding communities. I provide a discourse on two particular cases, the town of Mastatal and an ecolodge named Selva Bananito. It is important to note education when it comes to environmental research because education teaches the community to understand how to be a responsible environmental citizen. I aim to discover what type of emphasis is placed on the care and keeping of Costa Rican wildlife and the environment. The emphasis that is placed on appreciating the environment will impact the environmental success of ecotourist sites in the future.

Interviews:

One of the main targets for this research is to understand how Ecotourism has impacted the lives of the individuals who live within Costa Rican society. I find that one of the most effective ways to understanding peoples' lives is to participate in a non-structured dialogue about their experience, allowing interviewees to tangentialize their involvement with the ecotourism system.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with informants to establish an open dialog about their experience; however, I created a list of questions to guide the conversation to gather specific information (See Appendix A) using a questionnaire from previous undergraduate research (McKeone, 2011) as a basis for my questions in understanding about how Costa Ricans conceptualize their experience with ecotourism. My questionnaires were to ensure that I achieved as much data as possible, however, the majority of my interviews consisted of with conversation with my informant. I knew some of my informants on a more personal level, thus

our introductions were more causal. Also, each participant was required to sign a written consent form (see appendix B.).

Qualitative data gathered from semi-structured in-depth interviews demonstrate the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on Costa Rica. My informants were selected based on their knowledge of or direct relation to the ecotourism industry. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and a half, however one informant's interview was cut short to about fifteen minutes. I still conducted the interview because I found my informant's knowledge significant to my research. I also chose these informants in particular because I was able to build a rapport with these individuals over the four months I spent in Costa Rica. Interviews were recorded on eXtra Voice Recorder by Xwavesoft for Mac and were transcribed verbatim after all interviews were complete. Not all information was transcribed for my third informant because the data from the later portion of the interview was not significant to the topic of ecotourism. Three of the five informants have been involved with or work within the ecotourism industry. To code my empirical data, I read through each transcribed interview and looked at prevalent themes.

Informants

My first informant (Informant 1) studied biology at the University of Costa Rica. She chose biology as her field of study because she had always loved nature and animals ever since she was young. Her parents are both from France. She works at Universidad Veritas in the region of Zapote in San Jose province as a Cultural Integrator whose duties consist of providing cultural activities for students, orientation, logistic and payments, while teaching tropical ecology twice a week.

My second informant (Informant 2) is a trained biologist who has worked in tourism and with tourism projects as a guide in the past. He manages his own tourism business. Thus, he works both as a guide and planning tours. Also, he teaches the Ecotourism class at Universidad Veritas which has helped him work very closely with a variety of tourism businesses.

My third informant (Informant 3) is a native Costa Rican male, between the age of twenty-five to forty years of age. My informant received his undergraduate degree in forestry engineering at the Technical Institute of Costa Rica in Cartago. After his career, he started working in forest in Tavacon and has been working in forestry related work ever since. He currently manages a hydroponics and indoor farming business and teaches an Environmental Impacts and Social Development course at Universidad Veritas.

My fourth informant (Informant 4) is a native Costa Rican, female between twenty-five and forty years of age. She received a bachelor's degree in Biology and her master's degree in biotechnology. For her first job, she worked on a bio safety project related to GMO research. She worked with this project for three years and began her current position with the Office of Commission for Biology and Biodiversity Management for the Ministry of Environment whose purpose is to apply the third objective of the convention of biological diversity (CDB) and ensure benefit sharing from the use of biodiversity in surrounding country; her office particularly works with Costa Rica. She also has taught a course on sustainable development at Universidad Veritas for the past two years for international students who come to learn about different sustainable practices and current environmental issues facing Costa Rica.

My fifth informant (Informant 5) is a forty-four year old Costa Rican male. He received his undergraduate in economics and his graduate degree in communications and education. He teaches a variety of courses at Universidad Veritas, including the Introduction to Economics in

Latin America class.

Costa Rica as Agency in the Environment

Clifford Geertz and Sherry Ortner may view Costa Rica as having agency within the environment. According to Geertz, “ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts... keeping a diary, etc.,” all of which I considered while in while in the field (Geertz, 1973; as cited in Moore & Sanders, 2006, p 237). However, suggests that it is much more: ethnography is how one determines the meaning of the social facts are produced, perceived, and interpreted. For Geertz, ethnography is like trying to read, or construct a reading of a manuscript; a manuscript which is “foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, written in transient examples of shaped behaviors” (Geertz, 1973; as cited in Moore & Sanders, 2006, p 238). In essence, an ethnographer must relatively interpret a society’s culture according to its specific cultural context. Essentially, as Geertz suggests, “anthropological writings are themselves interpretations,” thus, anthropological works are interpretations of how informant interpret their society Geertz, 1973; as cited in Moore & Sanders, 2006, p 241).

While conducting my research I have had to appropriately interpret what my informants have disclosed about their society’s culture based on their experience. In this way, I have also had to take into consideration my informants’ agency within their society’s culture. Subjectivity, as Ortner suggests, is the basis of agency, in that it is necessary for the anthropologist to understand how people try to act upon the world even as they are acted on (Ortner, 2005; as cited in Moore & Sanders, 2014). In relation to my research, my informant’s choices and views of the world are constructed though their experiences within their society. As an example, four of the informants that I interviewed worked in a biologically related profession, while the fifth received

his undergrad in economics and works within the political sphere; one can imagine the contrasts in ideas and self-perceptions of my informants within their society.

In connection to my informants and subjectivity, their opinions and how they view their world are shaped by their lived experiences in the Costa Rican cultural context. Their careers have shaped them to have certain beliefs, practices, and teachings, and their decisions are shaped in response to their cultural truths.

Results

There are common themes that my informants had discussed (**Table 1**). This is either because they were topics from the interview questions I prepared or were naturally generated through conversation.

Theme	Informants who mentioned theme	Example
Conventional tourism having power over local communities	1, 2, 3, 4	“Probably one of the biggest impacts is cultural, and probably a bit emotional. People might feel that their community not so much theirs anymore and that foreigners have more power than they do...” – Informant 2
Greenwashing	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	“So, I guess it’s kind of a really sensitive or really cautious topic in the sense that, of what I’ve seen, not all of the ecotourism sector is that sustainable or ecofriendly.” – Informant 3
Human impact (both positive and negative)	1, 2, 3, 4	“Just because there are people doing things, for example, very subtle things, noise; just a group of people making just noise to disturb bird movement patterns.” – Informant 1
Eco certifications	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	“In sustainable tourism we try to reduce the impacts and also we have the Certification for Sustainable tourism (CST) that is a guide for different business so they can become more sustainable.” –Informant 4
Poverty	1, 2, 4, 5	“Poverty and tourism is a big topic because normally for the local communities the jobs that are given in the tourism industry are not necessarily well paid ones. You go from being the owner of the land to the one that cleans it for those who now own it.” – Informant 5

Table 1. Prevalent themes presented throughout interview data. Data is ordered by theme, which informants mentioned the theme in their interview, and a sampled quote.

The first prevalent theme I selected was the power that conventional tourism, whether it is a business or a group of tourists, have on a local community; this can typically tie in with how conventional tourism negatively impacts local culture. This theme was mentioned by Informants 1, 2, 3, and 4. Informant 1 revealed how hotels in Guanacaste who “[keep] the grass green during the dry season mean that a lot of people in the town are not having water for six months because all the water is being used towards the golf course... But it’s the people from the hotel, it’s getting the money, they don’t care about the community, and just continue increasing [their resource use], making locals unhappy and feeling powerless.” Or informant 2 who stated that “people might feel that their community not so much theirs anymore and that foreigners have more power than they do, and in terms of self esteem, that might have an impact there.”

The second prevalent theme was greenwashing, as Informant 3 describes it: “if you have an ecotourism project, or plan, or whatever [in] relation that you got with ecotourism that it will guide to a sustainable development. But in reality, unfortunately I believe that it is not always the case. So, I guess it’s kind of a really sensitive or really cautious topic in the sense that, of what I’ve seen, not all of the ecotourism sector is that sustainable or ecofriendly.” Or Informant 5 who suggests, “Costa Rica’s flag for the world is the green flag, so we need to support that line of marketing which becomes dangerous which we have talked before. About the green washing – how much of it is really happening how much of it is adorned? Is decorated?” This theme was mentioned by all five of my informants.

Another common theme was positive and negative human impacts, whether it refers to impacts on the environment, culture or the economy. These results will be thoroughly presented within the discussion portion of this paper. Informant 1 discusses human impact, suggesting that “ecotourism... is pretty recent in Costa Rica. It would be like people that is going for different

options of tourism that is involving a little more the nature, and the whole impact we can have on nature.” Informant number 2 said that “we may not get to full sustainability and maybe we will never get to full ecotourism because it’s impossible for humans to not impact the environment they’re doing anything on.” In regards to reducing negative impact, Informant 3 stated, “We try to promote tourism with smaller groups, trying to visit more sustainable hotels or businesses, trying to promote [transportation] horse or bicycle, which will cause less environmental impact in the area. This theme was mentioned by Informants 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The fourth key theme presented was eco certifications, more specifically, Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable tourism, the CST. This theme was mentioned by all of my informants and each informant spoke positively about the topic. When asked about the strengths of the certification, Informant 4 suggested, “the strengths could be the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), the Blue Flag Program, and all the concepts they imply... I think that this is one of the most important things, especially how Costa Rica, we promotes [these programs].” Or Informant 2 who believes, “the certification is really important, and the CST is really important because it’s a government approved and implemented certification. Probably, today it is one of the most efficient ways we have of trying to combat greenwashing.”

The fifth and final theme I have found prominent in my interviews was poverty. I had specifically asked about this topic since tourism is the number one source of revenue for Costa Rica. For Informant 4, “throughout the years, Poverty is going up and down in Costa Rica, and you can see differences, but it is difficult to say that this is because of sustainable tourism or other things.” Informant 2 thinks that tourism has made local’s lives better: “I know for example of certain people, specific cases, where people before the 80’s were doing really poor and now they are doing much better because they work in tourism.” On the other hand, Informant 5

suggests, “Poverty and tourism is a big topic because normally for the local communities the jobs that are given in the tourism industry are not necessarily well paid ones. You go from being the owner of the land to the one that cleans it for those who now own it.” The theme of poverty was mentioned by Informants 1, 2, 4, and 5. Overall I found that my informants had very strong views on the topic of ecotourism, however Informants 2 and 4 seemed highly educated on the topic of ecotourism as separate from conventional tourism. These five themes and others will be further discussed within the next portion of this paper.

Data Analysis: Informant Data and Participant Observation

When not defined correctly, ecotourism can be confused with nature tourism, adventure tourism, and many other types of “green” tourism; these other types of tourism are not necessarily ecotouristic. Manuel Antonio National Park, located on the central pacific coast, is the smallest yet second most visited National Park in Costa Rica. I visited the national park in October 2014 and could help but remember the strange behavior of the animals within the park; I saw a female raccoon run beside me and stand inches from my friends and put on a cute show for the rest of my classmates who were sitting on a nearby tree log. I had also watched monkeys ‘smile’ for pictures and run down the beach and steal packed lunches from tourists who were busy swimming. These were very unnatural behaviors for these animals. Raccoons are naturally nocturnal, so seeing one during the day was extremely peculiar. In regards to the monkeys, I had seen similar white faced monkey while hiking up to the waterfalls of Domincal and their behavior was extremely different from those of Manuel Antonio. The dominical monkeys would become angry, shaking the branches of the trees above us as a warning sign to get out of their territory in contrast to the Manuel Antonio monkeys who would pose for pictures and beg for

food scraps from the tourists. I mentioned my experience in the interview with Informant 1 who agreed with my observations about the wildlife in Manuel Antonio and the loss of natural instinct due to tourist impact:

That's the thing, if you have a little more open mindedness you understand that that isn't right. But for the majority of the people, the monkey close to you and smiling, but he's not really smiling, but it's really cool and you get excited, but that's not the best [for the animal]. And they just found out that having the animals around like that is like a hook to people; [tourists] start feeding them and that's how it continues.

Crocodile Bay Resort is another example of the potential derogating effects of conventional tourism. According to its website, the resort, a US business, is located on the Osa Peninsula on the South Pacific Coast, surrounding Corcovado National Park which has some of the highest levels of biodiversity in Costa Rica. The seventy-four-room luxury hotel offers eco tours to its guests and highlights inshore and offshore fishing for marlin, sailfish, tuna and other sought after trophy fish (Crocodile Bay Resort 2014). For a tourist who enjoys nature and fishing this hotel is a great fit, however, there are still potential risks for the surrounding environment and communities.

There are many environmental risks involved when developing a large scale resort in a highly diverse area such as increased water pollution, noise pollution, deforestation from construction, and many others. Increases in competitive fishing may cause habitat destruction in the local bay, deterring species to nest in that area and disrupting food chain patterns for that ecosystem. If the quality of the environment depreciates, tourists will no longer want to visit and profits will decrease. An even bigger problem is the effects on the local community's economy.

Usually with international tourism businesses, the money generated within their business does not extend to the local community. Big resorts, especially those that offer all-inclusive packages, do not promote the outside exploration of tourists to local businesses; so a hotel that provides food for its guests does not encourage its guests eat out at a local soda. Also, large resorts use high amounts of water, and in some cases, this causes water issues for communities surrounding the resort; communities that had access to water now struggle for a resource that was once theirs and sometimes need to pay for water to be transported. An example of this type of situation occurred with Hotel Riu Guanacaste and the community of Sardinal. Without consultation of the community or the respective technical studies, the company chose to extract water from the aquifer in the alluvial valley for the hotel, exactly in the location where the community of Sardinal is situated (Bystrom 2010). In addition, the hotel has blocked off sections of the surrounding beaches for guests to have a more private experience. Now, locals do not have access to the beach, even though, Costa Rican law prohibits the privatization of Costa Rican beaches. In situations like these, competition over scarce basic resources, such as clean water or electricity, spark social tension and conflict within local areas (Rabab et al. 2014). Informant 1 mentioned similar problems regarding other hotels Guanacaste region:

In Guanacaste for example, they are having huge trouble with the golf course because there are huge hotels and to have the really nice green grass they have to water the land every single day during the dry season. And keeping the grass green during the dry season mean that a lot of people in the town are not having water for six months because all the water is being used towards the golf course. Those impacts for sure are like really tough; a whole town is without water for six months that now depend on a truck and is left dirty water

because somebody wants to come and play golf. It's like, go play golf somewhere else, not in Costa Rica. But it's the people from the hotel, it's getting the money, they don't care about the community, and just continue increasing [their resource use], making locals unhappy and feeling powerless.

Conventional tourism, and any type of tourism in general, brings a strong influence of globalization, modernization, and consumer culture to Latin American nations, especially Costa

Rica. Proposed projects for further development in Costa Rica has caused tension between locals and foreigners due to the locals' concern for the loss of their land, the area's originality, and the local culture (Nost 2013). Jaco, Costa Rica is an example of how rapid, unsustainable development in a short amount of time can create economic and cultural destruction.

Here, prostitution is the economically beneficial evil that sustains this small beach

town. Its financial dependence on it is much

greater than most members of the local population would care to admit. During the off-season,

most beach towns are practically deserted, but Jaco is an exception. Jaco is the only tourist

driven coastal town where the majority of the bars, restaurants, hotels and activities remain open

through the low season, or rainy season. Part of this is due to Jacó's close distance from San

José, the other half is due to its stability in sex tourism. The women can sustain themselves

Conventional Tourism	
<i>Negative Problems</i>	<i>Positive Benefits</i>
Poor waste management	Financial
High energy usage	Awareness & education
Money to foreign business	Creating Jobs
Profit Oriented	New Markets for local products
Short term/sporadic development	Diversity for the local economy
Overcrowding & community tension	Improved Infrastructure
Littering & erosion	Improved community facilities & services
Extra, unnecessary environmental pressure	New skills and technologies
Pressure on already scarce resources	Supports conservation
Locals are not included and their land is abused	Certifications & regulations
Potentially damaging if not regulated properly	

Table 2: Negative problems and positive benefits of conventional tourism to Costa Rica. The goal of ecotourism is to mitigate the negative impacts of conventional tourism.

through their work, making enough money to afford food and drinks at the local bars which keep businesses open year round. Many prostitutes use drugs to cope with the harsh realities of their occupation, including Cocaine, GHB, and Ecstasy, which are readily available to be sold to tourists as well; and where there is drugs, violence and crime usually follow (Strange 2012).

According to Informant 4 in our interview:

When [tourists] stay in places that are [not managed] by Costa Rican owners. So in this case all the money they are paying, they are not helping the local businesses. Also, when [tourists] go into a community just to check [it out], like a museum. This is very dangerous because the [indigenous people] could feel really, really bad; that the tourists don't want to understand their culture, they don't want to share. The tourist just want to go visit to see what they look like, or how they are dressing, or what they are doing, or what their houses look like; [tourists] go there and take pictures, like a show, and this is hurting these communities. This makes these communities very closed [off] and they try to avoid tourism.

But, ecotourism in its purest form works to reduce these negative effects of unsustainable development.

The goal of ecotourism is sustainability. According to Isabel Vargas, president of Costa Rica's National Chamber of Tourism, ecotourism "coincides with the positive impact of ecotourism in the country's economy, especially locally" (TCRN 2014, March 3). When I asked Informant three to define ecotourism and how it relates to sustainable development, he replied, "Ecotourism is a type of tourism that tries to achieve sustainability in all sense of the word and try to combat the problems that old fashion tourism has caused and keeps causing today" (see table 2). My fourth informant, who works for the Office of Commission for Biology and

Biodiversity Management for the Ministry of Environment whose purpose is to apply the third objective of the convention of biological diversity (CDB) and ensure benefit sharing from the use of biodiversity in surrounding country believes that ecotourism is extremely important since Costa Rica's main source of capital comes from tourism activity:

Tourists come mainly to observe and enjoy nature. This is a business but this also has consequences so you have to maintain the touristic activity while trying to impact the environment, and also trying to share or distribute the benefits from this activity with the rest of the Costa Rican population. Mainly [the focus is with] rural areas with less opportunities and try to diversify the job opportunities within different areas. We try to promote tourism with smaller groups, trying to visit more sustainable hotels or businesses, trying to promote [transportation] horse or bicycle, which will cause less environmental impact in the area. Also, trying to train the people in different areas, particularly in rural areas so that they may develop their own business to improve their wellbeing, moving towards social and economic equality. In any activity, agriculture, energy production, tourism and different aspects of the country life and keep in line the three pillars of sustainability. Tourism is one of the activities we have to take care of.

Costa Rica promotes and regulates ecotourism through its Certification of Sustainable tourism (CST) which is managed out of the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), the government sector that manages and promotes tourism in Costa Rica; the purpose of the certification is:

to make sustainability a practical and necessary reality within the context of the country's competitiveness in tourism, while looking to improve the way that natural and social resources are used, encourage the active participation of local communities and provide a new source of competitiveness within the business sector. (ICT, Sustainability CST, 2014, pp. 1)

Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism is a legitimate way to measure a company's sustainability; it aims to decrease green washing, or preventing businesses from publicizing they are "green" without truly committing to reducing environmental and social impact. In turn, CST Certified businesses can use their label legitimately for local and international marketing purposes. The Certification encourages healthy competition between tourism businesses to be as sustainable as possible and differentiates businesses based on the degree to which they comply with the CST sustainable model; this model works on a five star or more of a "5 Leaf" system of sustainability.

In sustainable tourism we try to reduce the impacts and also we have the Certification for Sustainable tourism (CST) that is a guide for different business so they can become more sustainable. It is a certification to promote their own business, but the idea is to change the business to save money while helping the environment and teach their guests. I believe that all those aspects are important, but I think that the most important piece is the educational component because they can share the knowledge and the practices to other parts of the country or even for tourism to bring to knowledge back to their home countries. So, they can spread the knowledge and others can learn from

them, and little by little you can increase the knowledge and reproduce the sustainable practices, which I think is very important. (Informant 4)

These levels evaluate how business interacts with local natural and cultural resources, while improving the community's quality of life while contributing to the local economy and community programs. The leaves are assessed through a sustainability index: (1) the interaction between the business and the surrounding biological habitats, (2) the management and infrastructure of the business, (3) involving clients in actively participating in the company's practices of sustainability, and (4) the relationship of the company and the surrounding community (Anywhere Costa Rica, 2014). These four levels of sustainability are the basis of what ecotourism is defined as to Costa Rica. Hotels must first fill out a questionnaire and then auditors come in to evaluate hotel as well.

Achieving this certificate is not meant to be easy; businesses must work to achieve five leaves at every level in order to achieve a total certification level of five leaves. For example, a business that earns five leaves in three index categories, but only two leaves in the fourth category, receives an overall certification of two leaves. As another example, to achieve a level 3 category, a hotel must complete at least 60% of the certification requirement for the four areas evaluated. Most businesses with a CST certification take measures to reduce harmful admissions, conserve water and energy, and use biodegradable products while encouraging their guests to fully participate in their environmental operations and employing residents of neighboring communities. A high importance is placed on the interacting with locals and providing education for the local community, supporting their development for the future. According to the ICT, "Sustainability, as a model of development, seeks to meet the current demands of society without compromising the rights of future generations to meet theirs" (Sustainability CST, ICT, 2014).

Through evaluating hotels through the CST, and even other sites such as beaches, schools, and other private and public establishments through the Blueflag program, a government organization that hold a similar vision as the CST, Costa Rica aims to reduce “green washing.”

One may wonder why tourists might feel disappointed when visiting Costa Rica when the country places so much stress on combatting “green washing.” In a perfect world, the idea of ecotourism represents a closed, sustainable circuit with minimal impact. I asked Informant 1 if some ecotourism sites are not as sustainable as they claim they are, and in a sense, they cheat. She responded, “Yeah, some of them cheat. Its been the ‘in’ thing right now to be green... but they are not really like that. In the place that I worked they stated to do little things like that, for example they had a bio digester to use the gas that was being produced to cook in the kitchen, but it wasn’t working yet. They are just a little bit ahead of lying a little, they have little visual impacts on people that it’s not true. I asked a similar question in reference to greenwashing to Informant 3 he disclosed to me that the auditors from the Institute for Tourism in Costa Rica, which monitors the CST, have found many of examples where business are “saying that they’re managing their solids their doing a lot of things and they go see it and what they find is that they have done a good job on covering a lot the thing.” He also suggested that tourism businesses will have a certain portion of their property put aside that they show as ectourism and “They will tell ‘oh yeah this is where we treat this, this and this’ but when you actually go, it’s just like a pool without any treatment” (Informant 3). Informant three discussed one of his personal experiences in the Arinal region while he was conducting research for his undergraduate degree:

I went to Tabacon, five star hotel, five star on the thing (CST), perfect I mean their really doing a great job. But you go to one that it’s, one of the ones that’s nest to one of the Baldi (hot springs), um, hot spring that is a famous one. I

don't remember the name of the hot spring area... and they found out that they were promoting [being green] but they were having the residual waste management to a certain point. They [were] kind of like really tricky. They were actually treating some of the parts but were sending another part to the river, so they had kind of a deviation kind of thing. So they were submitting for the CST and that was kind of funny. And I was there because I work on that area for like a year, and I was doing a lot of inspections, not for the government but it was more for my studies for my degree at the university. I was working in Tabacon but my idea was kind of comparing those kinds of things. When I was there were some people there and they found out that yeah, that again they were treating some part of the area they were presenting to the auditors and then they had some neighbors that were complaining about the smell and that there were some deviation on part of the waste flowing directly to the river, etc. etc. etc. I'm not saying all the people are doing it and like that, but I've seen it happen that they are promoting, their even getting certifications and we really need to be thorough with all of this. Because at the end of the day with the tourism or ecotourism it's a business and their looking for profit and to get as much tourism as they can.

In our interview, Informant 4 told me "Costa Rica's flag for the world is the green flag, so we need to support that line of marketing which becomes dangerous...About the green washing, how much of it is really happening how much of it is adorned? Is decorated? And how bad marketing it is when people realize things are not really what they were paying for." Every system has its flaws and corruption allows for loopholes in the system. Informant 5 mentioned

the contradicting actions of former president Laura Chinchilla Miranda:

When you have a president of the country that says that ecologic, environmentalists, and activists want to make Costa Rica a museum of natural history while she is meeting up with the cattle industrialists in the northern part of the country, you wonder, you wonder how much of it is just a discourse, how much of it is really a development model. She was meeting with entrepreneurs in the northern part of the country, which is mainly cattle country. So yeah, they are not very much environmentalists because cattle and herds of cattle are not very good for the environmentⁱⁱ.

Still, if ecotourism was truly a priority for Costa Rica, then the problems previously discussed would not exist. As discussed, a certain degree of ethics must be involved if a business is to be completely ecotouristic; in addition to reducing environmental damage, a company must focus on generating wealth for the local community as well as creating revenue for itself through hiring locals, supporting local businesses and artisans, and providing educational opportunities and sustainable projects for surrounding communities. With ecotourism, money generated stays inside the country and feeds sustainable, local development. Even government officials realize for that the next ten years the nation must focus on the experience offered to its customers, environmental sustainability and “eco-efficiency” of its operations while listening to the needs of local entrepreneurs (TCRN 2014, January 3). While in Costa Rica, I experienced a few small ecotourism businesses including the various sustainable projects in the rural town of Mastatal and even more specifically, Selva Bananito Lodge outside the providence of Limon.

Mastatal Costa Rica: a Case Study on An Ecotourism Town

My Sustainable Development class at Universidad Veritas went on a weekend trip to Mastatal, a town located in Puriscal, San José, which is known for its various sustainable projects. The class visited the following three sustainable projects: Rancho Mastatal, La Iguana Chocolate, and Villas Mastatal Sustainable Organic Farm. Each project was unique and sustainable in its own way, from bio digesters to organic farming techniques; I, however, found some projects more impressive than others. This paper will discuss the three projects that are located just outside La Cangreja National Park, and were visited during the fieldtrip excursion that took place November 29-30th 2014. The location in Mastatal is particularly important because of its being a junction point between the dry forest of the north and the wet forests of the south of Costa Rica.

The first project, Rancho Mastatal, is primarily used as a space where people can come for volunteer work and internships to learn different skills that the ranch has to offer in areas such as sustainable living, renewable energy, natural building, agroforestry, permaculture, and community development. They also have educational workshops throughout the year. Most of their buildings are constructed through one or more architecture processes known as cob, wattle and daub, or timber framing. All of these building styles can be done by hand, with renewable resources, and without the use of power tools. Cob is a natural building material made from clay, water, and usually hay. Rancho Mastatal prefer this type of construction because it is durable and can withstand high amounts of seismic activity. It was also used in the construction of their oven as well. Wattle and daub is another building process used for constructing walls that requires woven strips of wood daubed with a similar cob material. Timber framing is used to make the wooden structures around the property. In this process, pieces of wood fit together like puzzle

pieces and are wedged with a wooden plug that nails two pieces of fitted timber together.

Some other interesting components of the lodge were the composted toilets and the biodigester that produces methane for cooking. I found it fascinating that it takes 45 -60 days to process the solid waste in the biodigester into methane, thus, around January to February, Rancho Mastatal could be cooking with what our class left behind a few months earlier. The project also had a series of agricultural efforts around the farm from growing bananas to Katook plants (which we ate in our salads for lunch). Throughout our tour, our guide focused on the importance of nitrogen fixating plants that help promote the growth of other vegetation. Atop many of the buildings were solar-heated water containers that provided hot water for the showers. In addition, solar panels were connected to the lights; however, the electric plugs around the ranch were still connected to the grid.

My classmates and I noticed various deficiencies in the management of Rancho Mastatal. The first problem was with the chickens that were knowingly fed GMO feed to support their growth; there are various arguments whether the use of genetically modified organisms are sustainable or not (Goldbas, 2014; Smith, 2014; Tweed, 2015). There seemed to be a lack of organization in the project; interns or volunteers come to do work for a period of three to four months at a time, starting and continuing on their own sustainable projects. However, one could see where certain projects were left unfinished with no one to pick up where the other person left off. Even the founders of the ranch do not live on site for a portion of the year; we received tours from a family member and another intern, not the owners. Rancho Mastatal does not have someone who is there year round to supervise the projects and to make sure they are maintained properly and finished. For example, there was an aquaponic system in areas in front of the ranch that looked disheveled and had no plants growing besides a section of peppers. Next to that

system were some raised beds containing a few herbs which looked very neglected. My tour guide said that the ranch uses “dirty farming,” a process in which seeds are planted and then one just wait to see what happens. That might work for the bananas that grow on the ranch; however, it is a different situation when you are working with a series of raised beds because they are not in a natural, regenerating area and need more tending to. For one of the composting toilets for solid waste there was a hose that went through the compost that heated the water for a shower. This happens because the composting process of the fecal material produces heat. However, the chemicals within the compost deteriorated the hose connections, thus, the ranch could no longer produce hot water for that shower system. Finally, our tour guide explained that they still needed to go out and buy produce because they were unable to grow all their food needs on sight because “some things just don’t grow.” However, this statement seemed very unconvincing.

The second project we visited was La Iguana Chocolate where we learned about their organic methods for processing cacao. The family has thirty years of experience producing organic cocoa and seven years making their own chocolate. Their cocoa fields are about two kilometers from the ranch, however they have a smaller farm encompassing their ranch, which is specific for giving small tours. This is a smart and sustainable idea because it reduces the impact that the tourists would have if they had to travel two kilometers to the fields. When the cocoa is ready to be harvested, once it is a rich yellow color, the family will go out and harvest the pods. However, they do not bring the pods back to the ranch, *but instead* cut them open and remove the seeds from the pods before transporting them back from the ranch. They said that one of the difficulties with organic cocoa is that there is a fungus that turns the pod brown and inedible, so they remove the pod from the tree as quickly as possible. They also pick off smaller, shriveled pods from the trees so the tree can focus its nutrients on the more healthy pods. Once the seeds

are collected they are fermented in a wooden box for about two weeks and then placed in the sun to dry for another 4 – 5 days. There is a lighter colored variety of seeds which are of higher quality cocoa plants and can produce a higher quality chocolate; they are known as *Porcelana*. The class was able to shell the cocoa seeds and prep them for grinding. Our tour guide also showed us how they extract the cocoa oil through a special machine. A few of us were allowed to grind the cocoa into a smooth, creamy chocolate mud which we then mixed with sugar cane, or dulce, to make chocolate. Visitors are encouraged to partake in the step by step which educates them on a sustainable way to make chocolate.

The final project we visited, and actually stayed at, was Villas Mastatal, an organic farm with 20 hectares of forests, rivers, waterfalls, and natural resources. The mission of this project is to have a natural, organic, biodynamic and rural way of life. This project was significantly more organized than Rancho Mastatal. All their food was grown locally on their farm through sustainable agriculture. The farm extension is 50 acres including a wild forest and has been owned by the family since the 1970s. The farm follows permaculture principles and practices while integrating aboriginal knowledge of the region, resilient design and regenerative agricultural techniques. I found their agricultural to be particularly interesting. They would plant three trees together—the tree you wanted to grow, banana plants for shade, and a plant that would fix the nitrogen surrounding the plants. Planting crops with other vegetation increases plant growth through nutrient cycling as well as preventing pests that could potentially ruin crops. When you have a large cluster of the same crop in one area, the pests that feed off that particular plant variety have a large area to feed, reproduce, and spread, potentially destroying the entire crop. Having other *vegetation* surrounding the crops creates a sort of barrier between each plant, reducing the impacts of pests such as insect or fungus. Villas Mastatal used this

technique in growing their coffee plants.

The farmland of Villas Mastatal was designed in three zones that were periodically rearranged for nutrient regeneration. The landscape is formed in a staircase formation to prevent erosion with the help of vetiver grass which fixes nitrogen in the soil and converts as much CO₂ as one tree. Their roots can grow to be about two meters down and one meter wide, clutching onto the surrounding soil. The farm also has a series of trenches that they dig and the soil is displaced between the trench and a dead zone (a low fence-like structure made of debris and dead branches). Then, root vegetables such as yucca or sweet potato can be grown in the freshly tilled, unpacked soil and the ditch can be filled with water to keep the surrounding soil saturated for the nearby vegetation. Villas Mastatal has chickens for eating, hens and a rooster for eggs, two piglets, some cows and bulls, and a few dogs. There were also tilapia fish as part of their giant aquaponic system, which benefits the farm since the tilapia feces become food for the plants grown in connected troughs. Similar to Rancho Mastatal, Villas Mastatal has compost toilets and a compost shower, which uses the heat produced from the work of the microorganisms to heat their water. The farm also has a worm compost created from the top layer soil layer from the nearby forest, food scraps, and animal feces. The structures on the farm are made from wood that is grown on the farm, with mud and reusing bottles, broken tiles and cups. There is also a small cob oven. I conclude that Villas Mastatal was managed much more efficiently than Rancho Mastatal specifically because the owner of Villas Mastatal is always present and working on their projects. In addition, the owner of Villas Mastatal mentioned that members of the farm work on local projects at the local school and help maintain the local soccer field. I appreciated how the owner mentioned that the farm goes into the community and works on local projects at the school or even painting the local soccer field. In addition visitors were required to work on

one of their projects; my group in particular had to clear a ditch and plant sweet potatoes.

Sustainable tourist activities in which travelers are encouraged to actively participate in hands on work for education and transformative purposes is called hard tourism (Weaver, 2005).

Selva Bananito Lodge

The Selva Bananito Lodge is another example of sustainable ecotourism in combination with nature and adventure tourism. This lodge has owed a level five Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) rating through placing importance on sustainability and community involvement. Each of its cabins is like a self-sufficient cell creating a whole self-sustainable organism. This paper contains information that I learned about the trip and my own personal reflection.

The Selva Banito is located in the upper Bananito River Watershed, in the Province of Limon, Costa Rica and is found between the Caribbean and the Talamanca Mountains. Its main focus is Ecotourism along with nature and adventure tourism. I was very impressed with the lodge and how it placed a high emphasis on being sustainable. Originally the land was once used as a banana plantation from the United Fruit Company and then used for logging before it became an ecotourism lodge and a corridor to the national park (La Amistad). As we learned, Selva Bananito is not just a nature tourism site, because it implements all aspects of sustainable tourism as well; it not only considers nature, but focuses on its environmental impact and its social and economical impact on the surrounding communities.

At Selva Banito, over 80% of all precious woods are obtained from waste woods or salvaged woods from the 2000 acres that the family owns and that the wood was brought to the construction area via water buffalo. Their roofs are made from recycled banana bag material, too. In addition, the construction site was built in a predisturbed area from when the land was owned

by the United Fruit Company. They heat water with solar energy and their lights run off of solar panels as well. Selva Bananito uses biodegradable soaps in order to compost waste more efficiently by purifying the waste water with bacteria, enzymes, and water lilies. It is inspiring that the lodge recycles plastic bottles, aluminum and glass, and will take the extra trip to San Jose to do so when necessary. The lodge also tries to counterbalance most of the pollution generated by travel as well.

To offset the carbon produced by plane or car to get to the lodge, Selva Bananito offers the opportunity to plant trees as part of their reforestation program. The lodge grows plants native saplings in areas that were previously disturbed by the logging business they had in the past. They also work with two organizations where visitors can pay for emissions sequestration to make up for the carbon you displacing into the atmosphere. When a guest pays a company they receive a certificate; the certificate can be shown to Selva Bananito and a guest can receive a free tour. The tours that are offered are beginner and advanced hikes, horseback riding, canopy tours, waterfall tours, bird watching, and tree climbing. Costa Rica is definitely a better place to ride horseback than the United States because in America, people are always concerned about tourists “breaking” their horses. Thus, my horseback riding experience in Costa Rica is better than it has in the states. I also enjoyed the hike and being able to see the poison dart frogs up close and to see the vine canopy; it is really amazing to see how big plants grow when a forest remains untouched. Still, these are only the environmental components to the ecolodge (Selva Bananito Eco Lodge & Ecotourism, 2015).

Selva Bananito places a big focus on the cultural and economic impact that they have on their community. All employees are from nearby communities and the bi-lingual guides are from rural areas of Limón. A substantial amount of shopping is done at local stores while supporting local

schools and community activities. They really try to incorporate the locals as much as possible. The family also supports a local non-profit NGO that has a focus on water conservation. Fundación Cuencas de Limón has become a regional leader on watershed protection and educational programs, and the program gains some of its funding from income generated by the lodge and private donors. I remember the owner's granddaughter telling us about how the organization has taught the people of Limon where their water comes from and the importance of protecting the local watersheds. Overall, The Selva Bananito lodge covers all points of sustainable tourism: the environment, the local culture, and the local economy. The workers have a passion for what they do, and guests can tell that the lodge really wanted to invest in ecotourism by trying to cover all aspects of sustainability (Selva Bananito Eco Lodge & Ecotourism, 2015).

Tourism and the Economy

Tourism is Costa Rica's current development model generating more international revenue than bananas, pineapples and coffee exports combined (Fritschy, 2009). In the general sense, tourism is the leading contributor to Costa Rica's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) followed by agriculture. Since the economic crisis in 2008, Costa Rica has seen a decrease in the money spent by tourists per trip and their trips are generally shorter. In their *Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013*, Blanke & Chiesa (2013) reported that "in 2012 tourism contributed with 12.5% of the country's GDP and was responsible for 11.7% of direct and indirect employment;" on the other hand, some numbers suggest that tourism only may count for 5% of the GDP (TCRN 2014, March 3). Tourism accounting for 5% of the GDP seems a bit low, for in 2013 tourism generated revenues of approximately \$ 2.3 billion with the influx of 2.34

million foreign tourists (TCRN 2014, January 3). Informant 3 suggested that tourism, has improved the quality of life for locals:

Well what you see in the streets and what statistics show you is that the income gap is getting bigger and bigger in Costa Rica since the 80's and poverty has increased. What role has tourism had in that? It's tough to know. I know for example of certain people, specific cases, where people before the 80's were doing really poor and now they are doing much better because they work in tourism. There are some cases where I know it had made a very positive impact. I have never heard of the opposite. I know of no cases of people that were doing really well with something, and then because of tourism they are now doing worse. People that used to do something that now they can't do because of tourism [like farming] tend to be able to fill that niche with working in tourism.

If Costa Rica pushed for ecotourism and rejected foreign influence of conventional tourism, the capital generated though tourism could increase dramatically. In an article by The Costa Rica News on March 3rd, 2014, a group of researches from the United States published an article in the journal of the National Academy of Sciences showed, "that ecotourism has improved the quality of life of Costa Ricans living in areas close to parks and protected areas by 16%" (TCRN 2014, March 3). According to their research, ecotourism has a positive impact on poverty reduction. This is mainly because of the focus on community involvement and interaction within the ecotouristic location. The researchers described ecotourism as an activity that "favors sustainability, preservation, and appreciation of the environment (both natural and cultural) that sensitizes hosts and travelers"(TCRN 2014, March 3). The researches look at three

main variables: (1) changes in tourist and recreational services around parks and protected areas, (2) changes in infrastructure ranging from roads to health services and schools, and (3) changes in ecotourism services in parks and protected areas. Overall, the researchers found that areas with ecotourism have generally seen an improvement in the quality of life (TCRN, 2014, March 3); however, I argue that there is room for improvement in that the problems stemming from conventional tourism still exists, Informant 5 disclosed to me that:

Poverty and tourism is a big topic because normally for the local communities the jobs that are given in the tourism industry are not necessarily well paid ones. You go from being the owner of the land to the one that cleans it for those who now own it. And that, in my perspective, is very undignified. So are poverty rates lowered, maybe? Maybe we can see it when we look just at the numbers, just at the index. But when we see the procedure, I think it could be done in a much better way. Meaning, the procedure of sorting out the poverty is [putting] Costa Rica up for sale and then once the beach belongs to the foreign investor and that company creates a hotel, those people that used to live there and enjoy [their life] now have to go and work as the cleaning maid or the gardener. For me, that is very undignified. There must be a better way to fix poverty if that was really what they were trying to do with that logic.

Discussion

As previously discussed, tourism is Costa Rica's main source of international revenue for the country. A harsh reality of ecotourism is that not all ecotourism sites can provide tourists the luxury that large all-inclusive resorts can. Also, ecotourism seeks out a specific environmentally

conscious traveler while resorts have all inclusive packages, golf courses, and swimming pools; hotels that are more attractive for that romantic getaway of for an international business trip. Thus, Costa Rica must accommodate those travelers as well, in order to sustain tourism as the country's current development model. Particular individuals visit large, luxury resorts because they can afford it, thus it is assumed that that is more money going towards the Costa Rica economy.

Monetary assets are the main drivers of capitalism and westernized consumer culture.

According to Juliet Schor (2011):

The materiality paradox suggests that the rising importance of symbolic value increases, rather than reduces, pressure on the planet... when consumers are most hotly in pursuit of nonmaterial meanings, their use of material resources is greatest. And thus, we devalue the material world by excessive acquisition and discard of products. (p. 41)

However, it is not only the planet that suffers in regards to consumer culture; there is enormous pressure that stresses consumers to keep up with materialistic social norms. This results in more consumption. In addition, it is more than just physical items that this theory belongs to. It also encompasses concepts like gas emission, climate change, and especially tourism (Schor, 2011).

When accomplished correctly, ecotourism is a form of tourism that provides an educational experience for tourists and locals on the sustainability of the local environment, culture, and economy while conserving native ecosystems and improving local economy. The concept of ecotourism strives to reduce the negative environmental, social, and economic impacts of conventional tourism. It encourages the management and responsibility of the local populations while respecting and preserving their culture. Ecotourism focuses on empowering

locals, conserving traditions and heritage, educating both locals and tourists, involving locals in projects, and encouraging locally owned ecotourism. When a foreign or local business decides to construct an ecotourism project, the locals are welcomed to participate, learning skills that they could use in creating their own business. Economically, ecotourism focuses on supporting local communities by hiring locals, supporting small local businesses, and providing education and programs for local communities, similarly to how Selva Bananito Lodge creates educational events with Fundación Cuencas de Limón. Typically wages for those working for the ecotourism sector are on average higher than agricultural occupations and through Costa Rica's Payment for Ecosystem Services system through the National Forestry Financing Fund (FONAFIFO), land owners receive stipends from the government for preserving their land. Finally, through Costa Rica's dedication to reforestation, the National Parks generate funding for future conservation projects and the maintenance of the parks.

Tourism has become the main source of capital for Costa Rica; however, the percentage of GDP generated from tourism would increase with a smaller presence of dominating international tourism businesses. The government should encourage the expansion of small, locally owned, ecotourism businesses and discourage the development of large international touristic enterprises. Locals are more likely to protect the environment if they are economically benefiting from their efforts. As conservation remains an agenda for Costa Rica, tourists will continue to flock to the country for vacation, education, and research purposes, generating revenue for the country. However, if the natural environment becomes deteriorated through agriculture and irresponsible tourism development, Costa Rica will see a decrease in foreign revenue in this area. For this reason, ecotourism may be used as a tool for future growth in Costa

Rica. As Informant 2 suggested, “possibly Costa Rica might be one of the best parts of the world where that might be a possibility.”

Conclusion

To expand upon my research would require about six months to a year in the field. Interviews would be conducted among farmers, ecological guides, ecotourism site employees, individuals working in both conventional and sustainable forms of tourism, politicians, those who work within the government sector and for the Costa Rican Tourism Board, transportation employees, locals living within urban and rural areas, and school teachers. I see it necessary that four generational cohorts are represented, specifically for those who have participated in or have impacted by the ecotourism system such as, teenagers (16-21 years), young adult (21-35 years), middle age (35-50 years), and elderly (50 -70 years) groups, to see the generational differences on how people conceptualize the impacts of ecotourism throughout history. Quality participant observation data is necessary for further expansion of my research.

Ecotourism should be prioritized for Costa Rica’s future development. I argue that ecotourism is a sustainable alternative to conventional tourism through implementation of three pillars: (1) concern for the environment, (2) preserving local cultures, and (3) providing for local economies. There are still many loopholes that exist within the tourism sector which cause weaknesses for implementing ecotouristic practices. Ecotourism could improve Costa Rica’s quality of life, particularly for those living in rural areas, if it become a priority and is implemented carefully. However, the main purpose of this project is to educate people on how to become more sustainable tourists; as my fourth informant explained:

I think [travelers] should respect the nature, they should respect the culture, respect the opening up to learn and respect [the culture], and to transmit the things that they learn in the country. And to try to do their own research when choosing the places to visit and choosing the places to stay, trying to help locals because it is one of the most important to me in really helping the development of rural communities. You enjoy, you learn, and you also could help. And it doesn't always mean [you are spending] more money. You can spend the same money, and you can be proud that you gave to that particular community, or to that family, or to that person.

Appendix A: Ecotourism Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. How has living in Costa Rica, a place that contains 5% of the world's biodiversity, affected your life?
3. How do you describe ecotourism? How does it relate to sustainable development?
4. Do you feel that the ecotourism industry does more harm or good in regards to environmental conservation and long-term sustainability? Can you give me an example?
5. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the industry in environmental protection?
6. What are the direct effects on the environment as a result of the ecotourism industry?
7. Has the private conservation efforts of Costa Ricans impacted the ecotourism sector.
8. How have local cultures been affected by the ecotourism industry? Please give a few examples, both positive and negative if applicable.
9. Do you perceive that the influx of tourists and foreign business has instigated some of the westernization in Costa Rica?
10. Do you feel that local people are often resentful towards tourists? Can you provide some specific examples?
11. Have the local culture(s) had to adapt to tourism and ecotourism? Could you provide any examples of this?
12. How does ecotourism impact the economy in Costa Rica?
13. Does the money generated by the ecotourism industry stay in the local economy or does it leave the country? Does ecotourism significantly reduce the rate of unemployment in Costa Rica?
14. Does the money from the ecotourism sector used to create community projects toward conservation and sustainability? Education? Can you think of any specific projects?
15. Is the money generated from ecotourism used to further conservation efforts in Costa Rica; or is the money more used to further development?
16. Has there been a reduction in poverty rates due to employment generated by the ecotourism activity?
17. How do wages in ecotourism compare with other professions in Costa Rica?
18. What types of people are hired by ecotourism sites?
19. Would you consider all tourist destinations sustainable; are all ecotourism designations sustainable?
20. How does Costa Rica Prevent "green washing?" Could they do better?
21. How challenging is the process to achieve a high Certification of Sustainable Tourism rating?
22. What does it take to be classified as an ecotourism site or destination?
23. Do you think that ecotourism is an effective way for other countries to develop economically, while protecting their environment? Why or why not?
24. Is there anything else you would add that you think could benefit this study?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Agreement

Title of Student Research Project: *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in Costa Rica: Environmental and Cultural Impacts*

Dear Participant,

I am asking for your voluntary participation in my Senior Thesis Project about Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in Costa Rica. Please read the information below about the project and if you would like to participate, please sign below.

The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of the ecotourism industry in Costa Rica in conjunction with the model of sustainable development. This project will allow for improved understanding about how Costa Ricans conceptualize their experience the ecotourism industry’s impacts on the culture, environment, and economy of the country. Possibly, the Costa Rican model of ecotourism and sustainable development could be implemented in my home country, the United States.

The time required to complete this interview is approximately 15 minutes to one hour. There are no known risks with this project. Participation in this study will allow for a better understanding of the Ecotourism industry along with sustainable development in Costa Rica.

Please answer the interview questions to the best of your ability. Participants are free to ask questions at anytime. The interview will be conducted during a arranged time and location.

You may refuse to participate in this survey and If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Also, if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time.

All responses you provide will remain confidential. The researcher will not share any confidential information, such as name or contact information, with anyone.

By signing below, I agree that I have read and understand the information above and give my consent to participate in this interview.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Kleszczynski

Student Researcher/Contact Information: Kimberly Kleszczynski/ kimberly.kleszczynsk@salve.edu
Advisor/ Contact Information: (1) Dr. Laura O’toole/ laura.otoole@salve.edu
(2) Dr. Jameson Chace/ Jameson.Chace@salve.edu

Participant’s Printed Name: _____

Participant’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Notes

ⁱ Emily McKeone has given me permission, via Facebook messenger on May 2, 2015, to use her literary work as a reference for Appendix A and B.

ⁱⁱ In Costa Rica, cattle raising is seen as more of an unsustainable practice. Raising cattle requires large amounts of clear-cut forest to create prairies to raise cattle. Which decreases the carbon neutralizing potential of the country as a whole. Also, most meat from cattle raising is exported and not kept within the country.