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Impact of Ecotourism on Residents of Monteverde, Costa Rica

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism is an environmentally centered approach to travel. However, few studies discuss the effect it has on local communities from the perspective of community members. In Monteverde, Costa Rica local conservation efforts helped promote economic growth. In this project, the impacts of ecotourism on Monteverde were examined and the perspectives of residents were documented using video interviews and questionnaires. Ninety percent of participants agreed that ecotourism had positively impacted their lives. However, residents voiced a concern about the upsurge in trash and sought government programs to help offset the increase in litter and encourage recycling. Concern over loss of community and culture was recorded in 89% percent of surveys and the increased presence of drugs and crime was mentioned in 54% of surveys. Businesses expressed interest in donating to conservation programs if they received certification for their participation.

BACKGROUND

Ecotourism is intended to minimally impact communities by contributing to an increase in economic infrastructure and development; biodiversity and natural resources; while promoting local involvement in the generation of capital and environmental appreciation. Monteverde is a small town located in Puntarenas, Costa Rica. With a population size of approx. 6,750 people. Conservation in Monteverde is linked to the Quakers.

RESULTS

Category	Less than 30	Greater than 30
Proceeds Donated to Conservation	33%	48%
Monteverde Natives	40%	71%
Costa Rican Natives	80%	90%
Importance of Conservation	100%	100%
Tourism Changed Monteverde	80%	80%
Positive changed > Negative	87%	90%
Work in Ecotourism	67%	52%
Aware of Local disc. for Cloud Forest & Children's Internal Rainforest	53%	67%
Visited the Reserve	74%	95%
Business would increase donation if certified	N/A	82%
Average Eco-friendly activities	2.93	2.86

Table 1: % of participants that answered yes on the questionnaire and average eco-friendly activities (out of 7)



Figure 1: Number of participants that work in eco-tourism

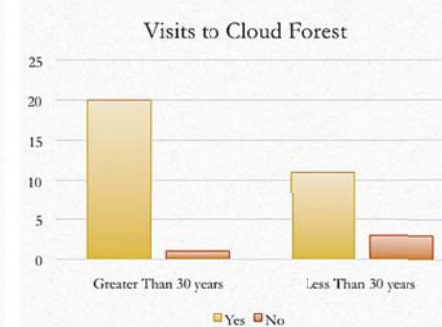


Figure 2: Average visits to Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve in each group.

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism in Monteverde impacted community members and encouraged sustainable living. However, the loss of culture and community were expressed in a large percentage of interviews.

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In 1951 they set aside a protected area of Cloud Forest as a watershed. The small piece of protected land later became the foundation of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve. Several other reserves and tourist attractions have been created since, and Monteverde now receives over 200,000 tourists a year.

METHODS

Questionnaires were given to residents of Monteverde in two groups: those living in Monteverde longer than 30 years who knew the community before ecotourism (n = 21), and those who knew Monteverde only after ecotourism (n = 15). Some of those interviewed also owned local businesses and answered additional related questions (n = 8). Individuals living and working in Monteverde (including residents of contiguous Cerro Plano and Santa Elena) were given surveys to complete. Questionnaires were intended to quantify and translate the perspective of the Spanish speaking residents. Each question was categorized and statistically compared. This project was approved by CIEE IRB.

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