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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 residents 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. 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.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Less than 30</th>
<th>Greater than 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Devoted to Conservation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monteverde Nature</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rican Nature</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Conservation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Changed Monteverde</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive changed = Negative</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in Ecotourism</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of local dev, for Cloud Forest &amp; Children's natural environment</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violated Reserve</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business would increase deviation if certified</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Eco-friendly activities</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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 was 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 were categorized and statistically compared. This project was approved by CIEE IRB.

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.

LITERATURE CITED