

## **Analysis of Ecotourism: The Municipal Reserve "Curichi Caujo" Buena Vista, Bolivia**

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My first real introduction to ecotourism came during my Peace Corps service in Bolivia at an ecotourism conference held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, hosted by Peace Corps. They had invited many guest speakers from different institutions within Bolivia and the Peace Corps Country Director from Belize, Costas Christ, who also happened to be the secretary of The Ecotourism Society. The other presenters at the conference spoke to the volunteers about different sustainable ecotourism projects and how they WERE integrated with Bolivian society. Costas Christ talked about ecotourism not only as a project, but gave an overview of important ideals in ecotourism. At that time, I was already working with the Curichi Cuajo ecotourism project. He had questioned us, asking what makes an ideal ecotourism project, what it took to make an ecotourism project work, and I then looked at my own project. This led me to my thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and list aspects of the ideal ecotourism project and compare it to the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo.

It is important to analyze a proposed ecotourism project beforehand to insure it qualifies as a sustainable business. A project requires considerable planning and preparation. The village must be an active participant in all stages of the project.

Ecotourism projects may not be suitable for all areas, nor all villages. Communities all over the world are beginning ecotourism projects, some are successful, some are not, and some are not even appropriate as an ecotourism project in the first place. If one is to determine if ecotourism is appropriate for an area, then one must to understand what attributes make ecotourism successful.

Many people have analyzed ecotourism in the past decade. Ecotourism is not as simple a solution as it has been represented. When someone sees a "nice little hill and valley" they may be tempted to promote ecotourism in that area (Simpson 1996 as cited in Southgate 1998, 96). The problem is there is probably another "nice little hill and valley" right down the road. Not all of them can or will be suited for an ecotourism project.

In order to investigate the suitability of the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo, a general overview of Bolivia is given in the following chapter. It discusses the geography, economy, history, languages, and protected areas of the country. This is followed by a description of the town Buena Vista and then a project description of the study Curichi Cuajo.

Chapter 3 opens by defining ecotourism. It then delves into a literature search of the two main components, physical and socio-economic aspects of ecotourism. In Chapter 4, the methods, especially the interview process, are discussed.

The results and discussion are reviewed in Chapter 5. This analysis is divided into two sections, my views as an outsider and resident views of Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with findings of this study and recommendations for Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo ecotourism project.