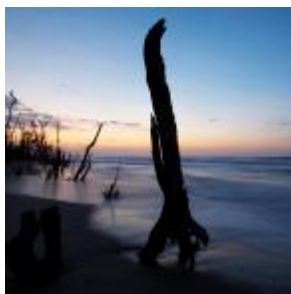




LA RUTA MOSKITIA, HONDURAS COMMUNITY BENEFIT AWARD WINNER 2008

CASE STUDY

La Ruta Moskitia, located in Honduras's 2 million-acre Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has created an example of how sustainable tourism development can provide training and education, support infrastructure development, and foster cultural preservation and environmental awareness. Founded in 2003 in partnership with the non-governmental organisation RARE Conservation, this area's first indigenously operated NGO is run by a board of directors comprised entirely of community members. The project consists of community-run ecolodges and tours, with a focus on long-term commitment to an authentic travel experience grounded in quality service.

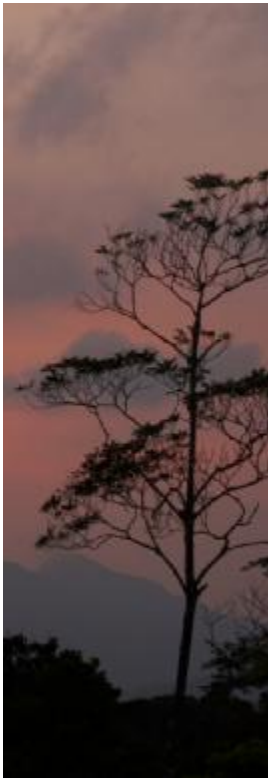


With a US\$189,000 grant from the United Nations Development Programme's Small Grants programme, five communities comprising two indigenous groups began capacity and infrastructure development in 2003.

Four community leaders were trained as 'ecotourism technicians' and returned to their communities to identify future ecotourism opportunities and stakeholders, and to assist with the formation of tourism associations and boards as the initial phase of the project. The project included a commitment to facilities built with local, legal, non-endangered renewable materials. Twenty-six farmers and fishermen were selected and trained for three months as guides, and in 2006 a test group of clients helped to identify needs for modification and refinement, which were then implemented.

La Ruta Moskitia opened in 2006, with 82% of the money generated going directly to the communities. Clients pay each individual community directly for services, and can subsequently see how their money directly benefits the community and supports environmental and cultural conservation. The remaining 18% of monies generated supports RARE and a conservation fund, expected to raise US\$50,000 in the next four years.

CASE STUDY



Each community's ecotourism association is responsible for clear record keeping and the allocation of profits (60% goes to community members based on individual hours, 40% to infrastructure development). The 150 community members with jobs in the project further support 750 immediate family members, and support hundreds more indirectly. Community members continue to receive capacity-building training, especially in areas of need that they have identified – examples include budgeting, operations and personnel management. RARE shares all visitor feedback with local community enterprises to provide for further improvement and capacity building.

As the project has grown, community members have expressed a growing appreciation for the area's natural resources – an appreciation that they themselves have learned from their guests. Community elders have expressed regret about previous practices that eliminated most of the area's crocodiles, for example, and are now working through La Moskitia to reclaim the area's past biodiversity and provide greater educational opportunities for their children into the future. This holistic approach to building tourism, focused on the sustainability of ecotourism and the community, is fuelled by education and active capacity-building, and RARE's collaboration with the five communities of La Ruta Moskitia provides a model for sustainable tourism development to flourish in the long term.

