

Wanamei Expeditions

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Resumen

Desde hace 10 años, la Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD) viene gestionando el reconocimiento legal de la Reserva Comunal Amarakaeri ubicada en el departamento Madre de Dios al margen sur de la Biósfera del Manu. Incluye 419.000 has. de bosque tropical desde el pie de los Andes en alturas de 2500 m.s.n.m. hasta la selva baja. Anteriormente vivían los pueblos harakmbut en las cabeceras de los ríos en este territorio.

Dado las necesidades socioeconómicas en las comunidades aledañas junto con el aumento de actividades mineras y madereras (legales e ilegales) por sus linderos, hace 3 años se formó de urgencia un Comité Pro-reconocimiento y Gestión de la RCA con la participación de las 8 comunidades indígenas aledañas. Son harakmbut, yine y matsiguenga.

Paralelamente con la lucha para el reconocimiento de la RCA, el Comité ha desarrollado un modelo innovador para el manejo y uso sostenible de sus recursos naturales del territorio. Acaba de inaugurarse la Empresa Multicomunal Wanamei con sede en Puerto Maldonado y oficina de venta en Cusco.

El fin de la empresa es vender servicios turísticos en la RCA y así apoyar al financiamiento de las necesidades familiares, comunales y el Manejo y Control de la RCA. Los ingresos para las familias llegan directamente a los comuneros involucrados como compensación para su servicio de coordinadores comunales, guías, cocineros, motoristas y a través de la venta de víveres en las comunidades.

30% de la utilidad se descuenta para el manejo y desarrollo de toda la RCA incluso el mantenimiento de la infraestructura y debajo la responsabilidad del Comité. 70% de la utilidad se reparte a las ocho comunidades de acuerdo con el tamaño (familias) de cada una.

El control de la RCA se realiza a través de un sistema rotativo de vigilancia familiar en combinación con el monitoreo dentro de la RCA ejecutado por los guías de turismo que circulan por un sistema extenso de trochas y ríos en la mayor parte del territorio.

El tipo de ecoturismo es nuevo para Perú ya que es una iniciativa indígena, una empresa de gestión indígena y el segmento de turistas para la Amazonía son mochileros y aventureros con el deseo de compartir una experiencia de varios días de viaje con guías indígenas. Los circuitos se realizarán en las tierras indígenas ancestrales dentro la RCA y principalmente en base al conocimiento tradicional de la población indígena local. Además, a su reconocimiento se tratará de un primer caso de co-manejo de un área natural protegida entre INRENA y la población indígena local.

Introduction

Normally ecotourism projects are promoted and conducted by an external actor to the local population; an actor who should strive to promote local participation and benefits in order to call it socially responsible. This project is all reverse because the initiative is local and there has never been an outside promoter or economical partner. However, according to needs of the Indian communities, there has been outside assistance in order to design the system, when so required. But there is no other direct beneficiary than the local population.

Wanamei Expeditions is probably the first ecotourism enterprise in the Peruvian Amazon that is 100% owned and operated by indigenous communities. We operate in the Madre de Dios region of southeastern Peru, located in the rainforest near Cusco. Our agency involves eight communities and bears the name of the Harakmbut Indians' sacred tree. We are now entering our third year of operation after two years of preparation and training.

The expeditions take place within our ancestral territory of the Harakmbut, Yine and Matsiguenga Indians. An area located on the opposite side of the Madre de Dios River from Manu National Park, and includes half-a-million hectares of virgin tropical rain forest (larger than the part of Manu that is reserved for tourism). It extends from the foothills of the Andes Mountains at 2500 meters above sea level to the lowland rainforest at only 300 meters above sea level. Until 40 years ago, the Indian population lived along the uppermost tributaries of the region's rivers, surrounded by an abundance of wildlife and vegetation so diverse that in 1977 UNESCO declared part of our territory as a World Heritage Biosphere site. Today this area provides us with clean water and a wildlife sanctuary, and maintains the sacred areas of our ancestors.

The trips we undertake with travelers are radically different from any other journey offered in the Peruvian Amazon, including those of the nearby-protected areas. Our expeditions follow our traditional hunting routes, and include travel along footpaths as well as in dugout canoes and balsa rafts. On route we sleep in tents on the beaches of crystal clear rivers. These rivers provide natural baths, an abundance of fishes for the menu, and drinking water that does not require treatment. Considering the isolation of our territory, it is essential to follow certain regulations and the practical advice of our guides. A detailed list of necessary gear will be provided upon reservation. Our prior experience tells us that children can participate as long as they come along with their parents and one or more families make up the entire group.

As a consequence of hundreds of years of living in our territory, we consider ourselves to be especially qualified as nature guides in the area. Based on our traditional knowledge we have chosen to work with the above-mentioned kind of tourism. However, we do yet not speak the English language. For this reason, we recommend that travelers understand and speak some Spanish— although some visitors without this capacity have characterized their experience in our territory as superior to their visit at Machu Picchu and the Galapagos Islands!

Among the sights that may be seen on our expeditions are parrot mineral licks, jaguars, tapirs, and a large variety of monkeys, including spider monkeys and many others. Each expedition is different, and we are always lucky enough to be able to show you some of these – but never all of them.

Last year our territory became established as the Amarakaeri Protected Area under indigenous management in coordination with national authorities. Therefore, we have decided to designate 30% of our profit to the conservation and control of the reserve, while the remaining 70% enters development funds for our communities, basically related to health and education needs.

We presently offer 8 routes that vary between 3 and 9 days, and are of varying difficulties. It is also possible to request special programs for students, scientists, or others having some special interest.

A project based on local social and environmental needs

The project departs from the needs presented by the eight Indian communities at an Indian Congregation in the Madre de Dios department of Peru in January 1998. The needs referred to two priorities.

Firstly, the interest to have the Harakmbut Indian's ancestral territory in the Amazon established as a national protected area under local Indian management. This priority had to do with the pressure from of approximately 10.000 gold miners and a large number of loggers, who were all beginning to enter the ancestral lands. This territory is still virgin rainforest and a refuge for wildlife reproduction and the sacred lands of the Harakmbut people.

Secondly, there was a lack of sustainable income possibilities in the same communities, leading to an over-exploitation of the natural resources in the entitled lands. Previously, the Indian population lived in smaller clans scattered throughout the entire ancestral territory encompassing 1/2 million hectares of tropical rainforest. The recent organization of the harakmbut population in large community is basically a consequence of missionary manipulation that began 55 years ago.

Living in larger communities and in contact with western cultures also brought about needs for education, in order to participate in negotiations (economical, political etc.) and to acquire western medicine to fight new diseases. Tourism occurred to be an obvious activity, because the neighboring Manu National Park already brought thousands of foreign annual tourists down the bordering Madre de Dios River without leaving any benefits in their communities.

Hence, there was a need to protect and reactivate the ancestral lands for sustainable resource extraction and to maintain the cultural basis of the Indian Culture.

Originally, the interest in tourism was thought as an economical activity to be carried out inside the community lands and without any direct connection with territorial management.

Then, in March 1998, the eight communities surrounding the territory formed a Planning Committee in order to discuss both the tourism and the territorial issues. Soon it became clear that there could be mutual benefits by combining the two priorities.

During the two following years of meetings and tests with voluntary tourist, a territorial management and ecotourism plan was developed. Today, tourism, territorial management and socio-economical development is linked in the following way.

1. Ecotourism is the primary economical argument planted in the state institutions and among the authorities to justify the gazettment of their Protected area (The Amarakaeri Communal Reserve). Otherwise the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Mining would rather keep issuing mining and logging concessions in the same area. Today the area has become a protected area.
2. Ecotourism supports conservation because it diversifies the income opportunities among the local Indian population and thereby reduces the otherwise intensive resource extraction to a sustainable level in entitled lands as well as in the protected area.
3. The income opportunities for 150 guides and other service personnel (Approximately 10% of the population) provide cash for family necessities.
4. 30 % of the profit gained in the Multicomunal Tourist Agency "Wanamei Expeditions" is designated the Management of the Amarakaeri Reserve carried out by the Indian Planning Committee.
5. 70 % of the profit is designated development funds in the participating 8 surrounding Indian communities according to their number of families; no matter how many tourists they have received. The use of the fund depends on decisions at community meetings. All profit gained from tourism throughout the first two years of training and planning has been reinvested in Wanamei in order to cover the administration expenses cost during the initial and official start of the sales office in Cusco (July 2001).
6. Most of the products of Wanamei are travels by trails and rivers crossing the reserve. These routes are strategically located in order to let the guides monitor illegal activities and intruders in the reserve. This way tourism finances the environmental monitoring directly.
7. The production of local food products is being encouraged in order to offer an alternative income possibility to people who do not want to become involved directly with tourism. At the same time, an increased food production back up good health standard in case of decrease in tourism due to political problems, natural catastrophes etc.

A skeptic analytical beginning

In the very first Committee meeting a work was done to self identify possible negative social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. Furthermore a long list of bad experiences from elsewhere among indigenous peoples and in rainforest regions were presented. Furthermore, we tried to identify an alternative economical sector, which could likewise produce the wanted economical benefits. No such was found; mainly due to extremely high transportation cost to a market. It was considered much smarter to let the customer pay for its transportation to the producer of tourism service and a local food production, which also guarantees a fair price to the producer.

Training and traditional knowledge

The groups of guides are made up by an older person joint by a group of younger guides, all selected on a rotation basis in community meetings prior to each departure. As the old people are carriers of the traditional knowledge, the younger guides will, exactly as the tourists, become educated in traditional skills and knowledge, such as fishing with bow and arrow, plant medicine, mythology, the geographical location of historical events; for instance the location of the first encounter with the missionaries and location of ancestral settlements. It is normally hard for the older people to make their youngsters appreciate that kind of knowledge, but the fact that the old people gain recognition from the western tourists cause a rapid interest in traditional values.

The projects are based on the principal that training is far more important than the construction of fancy infrastructure, such as lodges. The guide skills are passed on from more experienced or older people onto new integrants of the guide groups. And the number of direct beneficiaries is high as one Indian accompanies each tourist. All guides and personnel are Indian and the work is based on fixed salaries (us\$10/day) a rate 50% above normal daily income in the area.

In order to improve English skills among the guides and the coordination personnel in Cusco; a voluntary system has been set up. English – Spanish speaking persons are invited to stay in Cusco or in the communities between 1 and 2 months as a minimum. So far approximately 12 man months have been applied in this system.

Minimized negative impacts

The fact that the local population itself defines the rules and the design of the tourism model has provided the best guarantee against negative social impacts. In specific this has resulted in the following:

- a. Most activities take place outside the Indian communities
- b. The territory has been zoned and the tourism zone established respects sacred and ecologically fragile areas.
- c. The maximum number of tourist is set to less than 500/year, which matches a maximum of seven weeks of work for each one of the 150 interested guides among the 8 participating communities.
- d. The guides are selected in community meetings and on a rotation basis in order to avoid conflicts related to the favoring of families and friends.
- e. Delegates from the communities develop the regulations for the use tourism zone.

- f. There is a specific set of rules that apply for the tourists in order to protect and respect the Indian population as well as offering the tourist security and protecting the biological diversity.
- g. The tourism services provided are based on a maximum on traditional knowledge
- h. There is complete transparency among all parties involved concerning the economical priorities of Wanamei and its economical results.
- i. The regulations of the tourism zone insist on low impact use of the area: no boat motors, no chain saws and no loudspeakers are allowed, not even during potential future infrastructure development.
- j. The guides bring non-flammable trash out of the area.
- k. Due to instant cleaning of camps and tidiness, following tourists are normally unable to locate previous campsites when passing these.
- l. Wanamei does not work with heavy-duty infrastructure, nor do we gather many tourists in one place. Travelers of Wanamei Expeditions will never meet any other tourists when they have entered the trails. This is because we apply one-way applies in all circuits.
- m. The maximum size of groups is 8 persons.

The cultural interchange begins even before arrival

It is the policy of Wanamei Expeditions to sell directly to the tourist without neither national nor international wholesalers or travel agencies as middlemen. We believe the partnership between individual travelers and the indigenous population to be innovative. Tourists can communicate directly with the indigenous population's own personal in their preparation of their travels (by email) and on destination at the Indian managed and staffed sales office in Cusco. Community based ecotourism projects, in our opinion, should not necessarily promote international commercial partnerships as this implies higher consumer prices and consequently wrong expectations in terms of services to be provided at local level. Furthermore it involves the risk that poor or wrong information is passed on to the tourist. This has been tested and it is clear that most foreign agencies give priority to sales rather than "healthy" information.

Ijwai - Greetings from the jungle