

RIAT: An Introduction and Expected Contributions towards a Equitable and Sustainable Relationship between Environment and Ecological Tourism in the Americas

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It is a great pleasure for us to introduce this first issue of the Interamerican Journal of *Environment and Ecological Tourism* (or *RIAT* for its title in Spanish: *Revista Interamericana de Ambiente y Turismo*). Its purpose is to develop and disseminate new knowledge about the dynamic relationships between the natural environment and the quality of ecotourism activities in the Americas. The reason behind its purpose is simply that the environment's natural systems and resources provide cultural and economic harvests to the different sectors of those societies that know how to manage and protect these resources in order to enhance the ecologies of their regions and insuring the future sustainability of their communities.

In this introduction we wish to welcome our new audiences. We also want to mention some of the needs and opportunities perceived behind *RIAT*, as well as to recognize those entities who have supported us to move it from a vision to a reality, and finally we want to share with our readers and future contributors how we see its future evolution.

1. NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES BEHIND *RIAT*

The realities of the American Continent demonstrate very important needs. *Needs which create opportunities* where, tourism based on the environment can contribute positively towards an environmental, economic, cultural and social sustainability of the countries and regions that practice it. Consequently *RIAT*'s great challenge is to

demonstrate the importance of the development resulting from tourism activities has to inherently respect and preserve the natural and cultural resources that sustain that tourism. Such a challenge emerges from the realities and needs which in turn suggest the following tendencies and observations:

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- *Tourism is or will increasingly continue to be an important economic activity* in all countries of the American Continent at the short, medium and long terms.
 - *Tourism draws and will continue to draw environmental and cultural wealth* that in the majority of cases cause damage upon themselves, which at times is irreversible.
 - It is necessary that the traditional tourism activities, in particular those specialized in Ecotourism, *develop a sensitivity to value, market, protect and integrate with the natural and cultural resources available in the nearby regions.*
 - It is imperative to attain that the unitary negative (positive) impacts of tourism activity are diminished (augmented) through new conceptual, methodological, administrative and technological perspectives which *integrate through appropriate designs the objectives of economic development and preservation of natural and cultural resources.*
 - It is necessary to develop institutions that *foster and promote the tourism which appropriately values the natural and cultural resources and which creates appropriate collective and individual patterns of behavior* towards this objective.
- that are not destructive but rather conserve or enhance these resources.
 - Convert tourism in a tool which also values its cultural resources, and generates an interest in converting them into permanent economic resources through preservation. The American continent possesses immense cultural resources, of which some but not all in the form of the built environment. Many of these, including those identified as historic landmarks are deteriorating and in various instances they are not valued by the citizens who have inherit them.
 - Tourism development can turn out to be an economic, institutional and social tool for the improvement of cities in the continent. Cities in Latin America and the Caribbean have great deficiencies, yet, at the same time, within them as well as in their regional hinterlands great natural and cultural resources are found which could be utilized for the benefit of both, tourism and the recreation of their citizens.
 - Utilize tourism en rural zones as an important potential solution to sustain their social life, create productive activities and employment, and therefore minimize rural migration trends to urban regions. Arresting these migration trends is very important since the agricultural activities in many regions of the continent their sustainability is integrally related to diminishing employment.

The mission behind *RIAT* is to help view needs associated with such tendencies as *opportunities* to enhance the quality of life in our countries. To this end we see at least four great opportunities where the journal will contribute in a positive manner:

- Generate through tourism activities economic development that can help preserve natural resources and improve the quality of life of the communities in a region. The natural resources available in the American continent and the Caribbean are extraordinary. Many of them have already suffered deterioration and at times destroyed while producing very low levels of benefits for only some individuals and almost nill from the point of view of societies. Many of the existing natural resources are valuable for tourism development, however, often such development exits in the notable absence of a wise vision which values uses and activities

All these opportunities require human resources. Individuals that are informed and are able to lead in a process of change that, when in practice, will form a new paradigm and a new ethic from which to see tourism development and the natural resources as complementary and in need of each other for their respective sustainability.

2. RECOGNITIONS

In this part of the introduction we would like acknowledge and appreciate the various institutions who have been central not only to *RIAT*'s launching, but who are committed to insure its continuation. First we want to express our appreciation to the College of the Americas (or *COLAM*) www.oui-iohe.qc.ca/COLAM/, the Interamerican Organization of Higher Education (IOHE in English and *OUI* in Spanish) www.oui-iohe.qc.ca/; as well as the Canadian Agency

for Interamerican Development (CAID). Without their support the vision of *RIAT* could have never emerged and much less become a reality.

RIAT is being created as a vehicle to share new knowledge relevant to its themes been created by the Graduate Programs of the Networks of Universities of the *COLAM* as well as those programs from member universities of *OUI*. In addition of being an outlet for these contributing sources, *RIAT* is also created as a publishing vehicle for individuals from any public and private institution in the Americas (and other continents) who are related to academic, governmental, industrial or commercial institutions, and who are likewise developing new contributions and advancements towards the tourism and ecology of their countries.

3. RELATIONSHIPS OF RIAT

In more specific and operational terms, we do want to recognize two very important initial relationships to the launching of *RIAT*. These are the relationship with the graduate program of the *Network of Interamerican Studies for Environmental Management and Ecotourism* (known as *RIF-GAE* in Spanish), and the *European Journal for Environment and Ecological Tourism* (*JOST*) in England. Both of these relationships are seen as valuable not only on the long term, but initially as is the case with *JOST* and the reprints of articles being included in this first issue of *RIAT*

RIAT – RIF-GAE



RIAT emerges as part of the vision of Graduate Program on Environmental Management and Ecotourism (known as *GAE* in Spanish) based at the University of Costa Rica, and whose network includes the following six member universities:

the University of Colorado-Denver, USA; University of Costa Rica, San Jose, Costa Rica (coordinating institution); University of Oriente, Venezuela; University of Quisqueya, Haiti; University of Sherbrooke, Canada; and the University of Talca, Talca, Chile www.rifgae.ucr.ac.cr. These six institutions of higher education are

recognized in the American continent for their academic achievements and contributions to their respective countries. The Program offers great opportunities for interdisciplinary studies in different interamerican universities and cultures. *GAE* has been designed with a visionary philosophy that integrates the dimensions of academic quality, innovative pedagogical approaches, flexibility for the student, sustainability through its socio-economic utility, relevance to the future development of the Americas, and international recognition.

RIAT – JOST



RIAT is being launched in cooperation with the *European Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (*JOST*), www.channelviewpublications.net/jost/, whose Co-Editores are Dr. Bill Bramwell, de la *Sheffield Hallam University* and Dr. Bernard Lane of the *University of Bristol*. As part of this cooperation, this initial issue of the Journal introduces to Latin American audiences a set of four reprints of the writings by Drs. Bramwell and Lane: "Interpretation and Sustainable Tourism: The Potential and the Pitfalls." Volume 1, No. 2, 1993. It is considered a classic piece in the literature And "Sustainable Rural Tourism Strategies: A Tool for Development and Conservation." Vol 2, Nos. 1 & 2, 1994. Both of these articles are of interest to rural development in Latin America.