

Creative nature tourism experience at Roca Azul Biopark in Holguin, Cuba

Experiencia turística creativa de naturaleza en el Bioparque Roca Azul del destino Holguín, Cuba

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ABSTRACT

Creativity is a key element to enhance nature tourism experiences and promote sustainability at global and local levels. The objective of this article is to develop a procedure for the design of creative nature tourism activities, feasible for insertion in the excursions of the Roca Azul Biopark, with the purpose of favoring the quality of the tourist experience for consumers. To this end, the stages of preparation; diagnosis; projection, co-creation and co-production; implementation and evaluation were defined, combining documentary analysis, participatory workshops, market testing and the use of digital tools for collaborative design. The activities designed included interpretive trails, creative rural practices and naturalist workshops, integrating visitors and the local community in interactive and learning-oriented experiences. The results demonstrated the feasibility of the procedure, the acceptance of the activities and their potential to diversify the ecotourism offer, while strengthening community participation and environmental education. The conclusions highlight the methodological contribution as a replicable tool for the creative management of nature excursions.

Keywords: Creative tourism, nature tourism, tourism experience.

RESUMEN

La creatividad constituye un elemento clave para potenciar las experiencias turísticas de naturaleza y promover la sostenibilidad a nivel global y local. El objetivo del artículo es desarrollar un procedimiento para el diseño de actividades turísticas creativas de turismo de naturaleza, factibles de inserción en las excursiones del Bioparque Roca Azul, con el propósito de favorecer la calidad de la experiencia turística de los consumidores. Para ello se definieron las etapas de preparación; diagnóstico; proyección, co-creación y co-producción; implementación y evaluación, combinando el análisis documental, talleres participativos, pruebas de mercado y el uso de herramientas digitales para el diseño colaborativo. Las actividades diseñadas incluyeron senderos interpretativos, prácticas rurales creativas y talleres naturalistas, integrando a visitantes y comunidad local en experiencias interactivas y orientadas al aprendizaje. Los resultados demostraron la factibilidad del procedimiento, la aceptación de las actividades y su potencial para diversificar la oferta ecoturística, a la vez que fortalecieron la participación comunitaria y la educación ambiental. Las conclusiones destacan la contribución metodológica como una herramienta replicable para la gestión creativa de excursiones de naturaleza.

Palabras clave: Turismo creativo, turismo de naturaleza, experiencia turística.

INTRODUCTION

Creative tourism emerges as an extension of cultural tourism, conceived as an alternative to mass tourism and oriented to participatory and personalized experiences. It focuses on the co-creation of the experience between tourists and host communities, fostering self-realization, self-expression and learning in cultural and natural environments (Molina, 2016; Soto-Cáceda & Sialer, 2022).

In theory, the active participation of visitors in creative processes, the authenticity and sustainability of experiences, and community collaboration in the generation of tourism products are recognized as fundamental pillars (Sialer, 2019; León Estrada et al., 2024). These principles have been widely studied, highlighting the consolidation of the concept as a “new generation” tourism model, capable of providing differentiation, social cohesion and economic and environmental benefits (Creative Tourism Network, 2023; Creamades, 2013).

In practice, creative tourists seek authentic, interactive and transformative experiences, combining modalities such as gastronomy, ecotourism, language tourism or slow tourism (Gretzel & Jamal, 2009; S.-H. Chang, 2023). This behavior reflects a change in tourism consumption patterns, oriented towards innovation, learning and memorability. In this context, nature tourism offers unique potential for creative tourism by offering natural settings that inspire creativity, facilitate direct interaction with the environment and favor participatory and sustainable experiences (Quintana, 2017).

However, in the review of the literature on creative nature tourism, it is evident that although they share objectives and approaches, such as generating memorable experiences, promoting sustainability, favoring interaction with culture and the environment, and allowing active participation in the creation of experiences, consolidated methodological procedures that effectively guide their integration have not yet been developed. This underscores the need to develop guidelines and strategies that optimize the design of innovative and responsible tourism experiences capable of strengthening the quality of the visitor experience in nature destinations.

Creative tourism activities in nature tourism excursions: influence on the quality of the tourism experience

Considering the potential of nature tourism for creative tourism, it is essential to analyze how creative tourism activities are developed within the excursions and how they

influence the quality of the visitor's experience. The literature shows that the integration of creativity and contact with nature not only allows for unique and memorable experiences, but also strengthens the active participation of the tourist, experiential learning and interaction with the community and the environment.

The creative tourism experience results from the implementation of activities designed to promote active participation, learning and immersion in the environment (Serrano-Leyva, 2023). According to Pine and Gilmore (2002), contextualized to creative tourism, these experiences can be classified according to two dimensions: tourist participation (passive or active) and connection with the environment (absorption or immersion), resulting in entertainment, escapism and learning experiences (Jóhannesson & Lund, 2017).

- Entertainment: more passive participation, focused on cultural absorption through tourist activities.
- Escapism: active participation, with cultural immersion, generally through excursions.
- Learning: educational experiences with an emphasis on workshops and practical courses.

Serrano-Leyva (2023) identifies five key qualities of creative tourism activities that affect the quality of the tourism experience: uniqueness, interactivity, learning, novelty and memorability. Uniqueness responds to the tourist's need for differentiation (Luo et al., 2021), while interactivity ensures authenticity and participation in local community life (Sthapit et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Learning activities build skills and foster curiosity (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019), while novelty and memorability ensure innovative experiences and lasting memories that strengthen tourist loyalty (Wang et al., 2020; Munawar et al., 2021).

In the context of nature tourism, these qualities are enhanced through immersion in natural environments, interaction with biodiversity and local ecosystems, and active participation in collaborative conservation activities. This allows creative tourists to differentiate themselves from conventional experiences, strengthen their personal and social identity, and generate meaningful experiential learning.

Practical activities that can be developed include:

- Themed excursions: flora and fauna identification workshops, construction of natural shelters or team-building activities.

- Sensory routes: observation walks, tastings of local products or meditation sessions in nature.
- Artistic workshops: painting, sculpture or photography in natural environments, integrating creativity and landscape.
- Sustainable gastronomic experiences: picnics with local products, traditional cooking workshops or tastings in natural environments.

In summary, the integration of creative tourism activities in nature tourism excursions increases the quality of the tourism experience, generating unique, interactive, educational, novel and memorable experiences. These experiences strengthen the tourist's emotional bond with the destination, foster satisfaction and loyalty, and promote future visits and positive recommendations, consolidating the long-term relationship between tourist and destination.

As background to the research, the technology proposed by Serrano-Leyva (2023) was identified, oriented to the development of creative tourism accommodations that include escapism, entertainment and learning activities. This approach represents an important advance, but does not constitute a detailed guide for the planning of creative activities in nature tourism environments due to the particularities of this tourism modality. Nevertheless, it presents important guidelines, such as:

1. Determining the concept of the tourism product: clearly defining the value proposition, emphasizing creativity, authenticity and differentiation that will satisfy the expectations of tourists in search of memorable experiences.
2. Resource mapping: identify infrastructure, specialized personnel, equipment and materials necessary to guarantee the quality of the planned activities.
3. Feasibility assessment: consider the economic, logistical and operational feasibility of the activities, as well as the potential demand and expected return, to ensure the sustainability of the experiences.
4. The market test: obtain feedback from potential tourists to validate the acceptance of the experiences, adjust details and optimize the proposal.
5. The creation of partner networks: establish strategic alliances with local actors, artists, artisans and suppliers in order to enrich the offer, strengthen the authenticity of the experiences and enhance their dissemination.
6. The link with the local community: involve the community in the design and execution of activities, ensuring

sustainability, cultural respect and mutual benefits for residents and tourists.

7. Advertising and promotion: implement creative multichannel marketing strategies, including social networks, collaborations with specialized media and influencers, to effectively position and disseminate the tourism offer.

These guidelines constitute a frame of reference that can be adapted and expanded to design creative tourism activities in nature tourism excursions, considering the integration of creativity, sustainability, interaction with the environment and active participation of tourists, which are fundamental elements for the quality of the tourism experience and the loyalty of visitors.

From the analysis of the literature on creative tourism, nature tourism and existing methodological references, the need for a specific procedure to design creative tourism activities adapted to excursions in natural environments is evident. This methodological tool is necessary for its implementation in Rocazul Biopark, a natural park located in the province of Holguin, Cuba, on the west coast of Naranjo Bay, southeast of Yuraguán and Pesquero Nuevo beaches, 50 km from the provincial capital.

The biopark offers a peaceful environment to enjoy nature and adventure, guided by expert ecoguides. It has a rich biodiversity with endemic species, rocky landscapes and attractive marine ecosystems. It is part of the Oriente hybridization belt and the Gibara migratory bird corridor. Visitors go hiking, bicycle touring, bird and fauna watching, scuba diving and activities that showcase rural traditions. The park promotes nature and rural tourism, environmental education and sustainability, encouraging respect and care for the environment.

The objective of the research was to develop a procedure for the design of creative nature tourism activities, feasible for insertion in the excursions of the Roca Azul Biopark, with the purpose of favoring the quality of the tourist experience of the consumers.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study was organized in six stages, each with a specific objective, a general description of its execution and the tools needed to apply it.

Stage I. Initial preparation:

This stage seeks to create the necessary conditions to implement the creative activities. It consists of forming and training the work team through workshops and exchange sessions, ensuring that participants understand the concepts

of creative and nature tourism. Training sheets are used to record the topics covered and the level of understanding, and check sheets are used to monitor the team's motivation and willingness to work.

Stage II. Diagnosis of the current state:

Its purpose is to learn about the experience and perception of tourists. Social media content and reviews are analyzed, and direct surveys are applied. The analysis and perception sheets allow the consolidation of information on satisfaction, interaction with nature and learning, providing a basis for adjusting activities.

Stage III. Planning of activities:

This stage plans creative activities and verifies their feasibility. It includes the definition of concepts through participatory sessions, resource mapping, feasibility assessment and a market test. Concept, resource, feasibility and responsibility assignment sheets are used to organize planning and select supporting technologies.

Stage IV. Co-creation, organization and co-production:

Consists of developing the program of activities with the participation of clients and local partners. Co-creation sessions are held, necessary resources and technologies are determined, and coordination with strategic partners is documented through co-creation, resource and co-production sheets.

Stage V. Implementation:

Activities are executed following previous scripts and checklists, recording attendance, use of resources and feedback through control sheets. Intelligent technologies are integrated to enrich the experience and facilitate adjustments during execution.

Stage VI. Evaluation and improvement:

The quality and acceptance of the activities is measured by applying surveys and consolidating information in evaluation sheets and reports. This stage allows identifying areas for improvement, planning corrective actions and defining responsibilities and deadlines to optimize future implementations.

RESULTS

Stage I. Initial preparation

A team of five local tour guides and the commercial director, selected for their experience in group management and knowledge of Rocazul Biopark, was formed, working together with an expert in the design of creative tourism experiences. The training program covered creative tourism theory, activity

co-creation techniques, interpretive walks with wildlife observation, incorporation of technology, and analysis of successful cases in similar destinations. During the practical workshops, the guides identified biopark resources to transform them into interactive experiences, such as trails, mangroves, historic ruins, and local flora and fauna. At the end, interviews and surveys verified that the team was motivated and willing to implement creative activities, demonstrating an understanding of the benefits of creative tourism and its impact on the visitor experience.

Stage II. Diagnosis of the Current State:

The concept of creative activities was defined as "experiences to reconnect with nature and local culture." Participatory sessions were held using creativity techniques such as brainstorming and the Blue Dream method, where participants imagined ideal activities without restrictions, such as workshops on bioconstruction, nighttime wildlife observation, cultural routes, and nature photography workshops.

A comprehensive mapping of the biopark's resources was carried out, including trails, mangroves, ruins, flora, fauna, and local traditions, assigning potential creative activities to them. For example:

- Temple Hill Trail: Sunrise meditation retreat, educational activities about endemic flora.
- Naranjo Bay Mangroves: Kayak exploration with ecological interpretation.
- Compay Kike's House: Creole cooking workshops and country festivals with traditional music and dances.

The feasibility of each activity was evaluated considering legal, economic, environmental and sociocultural aspects, verifying compliance with regulations, costs, environmental impacts and community participation. A market test with 150 visitors showed high acceptance: more than 80% considered the activities unique, enriching and memorable, highlighting the kayak exploration, the meditation retreat and the rural festival.

Stage III. Activity planning

Responsible persons were assigned to each activity and strategic partners were identified, including biologists, local guides, chefs, musicians and farmers. Communication was coordinated through WhatsApp to share maps, ecosystem information and coordinate reservations. Participatory workshops were held with the local community, ensuring their integration and direct benefits: hiring as guides, participation in workshops and contribution to environmental conservation

through reforestation and education on flora and fauna. Publicity on Facebook highlighted the sustainability, authenticity and connection with nature of the activities.

Stage IV. Co-creation, organization and co-production

Clients participated in online co-creation sessions, where they defined schedules, cultural activities and degree of interaction, such as preparation of piglet on a spike, coffee brewing and typical dances. The integration of smart tourism technologies was planned: educational mobile applications, interactive maps and real-time multimedia documentation.

Co-production involved local partners to ensure authenticity and sustainability: chefs and farmers in culinary workshops, musicians and instructors in rural festivals, and guides in interpretive tours. Environmental logistics were also considered: routes that minimize impacts, biodegradable materials and eco-friendly transportation.

Stage V. Implementation

Previously designed and co-created activities were executed. In the Creole cooking workshop, tourists actively participated in the preparation of traditional dishes, following instructions from local chefs and using traditional utensils and stoves. The rural festival allowed the practice of typical dances and participation in live music, while tourists shared food and experiences. Educational tours were conducted through coffee plantations and nature trails, with interpretation on ecosystems, history and sustainability. Real-time photo and video documentation and the use of tablets enriched the interaction and allowed tourists to share their experiences.

Stage VI. Evaluation and improvement

Surveys and reports from those responsible were applied, evaluating satisfaction, interaction with nature, cultural learning and memorability. The results showed: 98% overall satisfaction, 95% interaction with nature, 100% cultural learning, and 99% recommendation of the activities. Areas for improvement were identified: updating kitchen utensils and expanding connectivity in key areas of the biopark. Planned corrective actions ensure that future implementations maintain the authenticity, sustainability and quality of the experience.

CONCLUSIONS

From the theoretical approach, the results confirm that creative tourism enhances the emotional connection of visitors with the natural and cultural environment, favors experiential learning and reinforces the perception of uniqueness and novelty of the excursions, as indicated by the reviewed studies. The integration of educational, cultural and

sustainable elements allows tourists to understand and value biodiversity, history and local practices.

Methodologically, the application of the procedure demonstrates the usefulness of structuring the design of creative activities in sequential stages - preparation, diagnosis, projection, co-creation, implementation and evaluation - combining tools such as activity sheets, resource mapping, market testing and smart tourism technologies. This systematic approach facilitates planning, activity feasibility and interaction between destination stakeholders and tourists, constituting a replicable contribution to the management of creative nature excursions.

From an empirical point of view, the activities designed in Rocazul Biopark: Creole cooking workshops, interpretive horseback riding, kayak explorations, meditation retreats and photography contests, generated high levels of satisfaction, learning and memorability. The participation of local guides, experts and communities, together with online co-creation and the integration of technological resources, strengthened the authenticity and sustainability of the experiences.

Among the limitations of the research is that the application was carried out on a single tourism product, with a limited sample of tourists and activities, which restricts the generalization of the results. For future research, it is suggested to apply the procedure in different nature tourism contexts, to evaluate its impact on visitor loyalty and to deepen the sustainability of the experiences in the long term.

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