

# Agrotourism – An Alternative for Development

This tourism branch provides knowledge about the rural culture and offers at the same time entertainment for a society that is evermore disconnected from tradition.

Agrotourism was born as a means to provide an alternative income basis for farmers. What makes agrotourism so special is the possibility to spend time in the house of farmers, who may focus on stock breeding, agriculture or forestry. Additionally, it serves as a tool to boost the economy in areas, which are run-down because of receptive operations and the incursion of the rural population into the direct commercialization of their agricultural and handcrafted goods.



Agrotourism encourages the integration of the rural family and protects/preserves its traditions with the purpose to show/display it to the visitors. This variety of tourism is more selective due to the fact that the homes of the host families only have a limited capacity. However, in return the tourists have the possibility to enjoy a quite and relaxed time with familiar attention and direct contact to the rural and natural world.

The rural communities and its organizations appreciate agrotourism as an important economic alternative. It generates new employment opportunities to attend an increasing tourism market consisting of families with children, individual backpackers, couples or groups of friends.

Agrotourism represents an activity, which has the potential to support the development of Ecuador, in

particular on account of the great response from banana, cacao and coffee plantations in the Coast and from farms in the mountains (“sierra”), which cultivate wheat, tuber vegetables and above of all flowers. Therefore, a noticeable number of farmhouses are improving their facilities and services for accommodation and food. Simultaneously, they promote the restoration of their architectural and cultural heritage.



One of the most impressive examples of agrotourism in Ecuador is the Rio Muchacho Farm, situated 35 kilometers north of Bahía de Caráquez, canton San Vicente (Manabí). This initiative offers experiences, which include harvesting vegetables in the gardens, grinding cacao beans to make chocolate and feeding the animals. Moreover, Rio Muchacho is the first farm on the coast, which is certified for implementing sustainable standards, especially in the production of food without chemicals.

Rio Muchacho started off as common farm for livestock breeding until it decided in 1989 to dedicate itself strictly to sustainable practices regarding environmental regeneration, reforestation, sound agriculture and agrotourism. To achieve this goal it integrated the neighboring communities. Ethnical tourism is a concept deeply rooted in this operation. Tourists are attracted by four significant elements: ecology, cultura montubia, adventure and environmental management. Other programs, which they promote on this farm, are Spanish lessons for foreigners and voluntary work in rural communities as well as tours around the farm to teach the tourists the planting process.

All that is left to point out is that all those actions in agrotourism should include professionals for rural development and tourism to guarantee a cautious and respectful way in developing this type of service.

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