

# ONLY 11% OF TOURISM REVENUE STAYS IN THE AMAZON



A recent analysis by the National University of Colombia focusing on Amazon tourism revenue showed that the greatest percentage of travel expenditure goes to air transportation – operated by Brazilian and Chilean companies – and that the remainder is spent on accommodations and mostly remains in the city of Leticia, Colombia.

Tourism in the Amazon began more than fifty years ago, but it is only in the last 15 years that it has turned into an important source of prosperity for the region. The growing environmental consciousness and interest in the exploration of the world's largest tropical rainforest – with its rushing rivers and biodiversity – is motivating hundreds of tourists to visit the region. **However, most of the tourism revenue is spent along the way, leaving little for the local communities.**

According to Professor Germán Ignacio Ochoa, of the National University's Amazon Office, “the global view of the value chain illustrates the fact that the greatest percentage of expenditure goes towards air transportation and that the remainder is spent on accommodations and remains in the city of Leticia”.

The professor explained that only 11% of tourism revenue reaches the indigenous communities which are usually tasked with organizing the local transportation, excursions, visits to communities, and local guides.

The ideas he puts forward result from the U.N. study which included field work within four indigenous communities, interviews with representatives of governmental agencies as well as from the private sector, participatory observations, and conservation workshops. The researchers also surveyed 300 tourists and reviewed all secondary information.

The professor warned that “despite the fact that the region – especially in Leticia and in the southern region of the Amazonian trapezoid – considers tourism to be the best alternative for the region's development, if this opinion is not in accordance with that of the local public institutions and leadership, it will fall short”.

While some family businesses have sprung up and while there has been an increase in employment and in the number of visitors to the region, **tourism continues to be controlled by urban companies which come away with the lion's share of the profits.**

Mr. Ochoa criticizes the emphasis which this region is placing on tourism since the packages offered by travel agencies are neglecting conservation and are leaving out any education of the tourists and are simply satisfying the demand for traditional hotel services.

Professor Ochoa commented on the fact that it is the indigenous organizations which should be the ones in control of tourism since the public officials who hold office in municipal administrations frequently change, preventing the elaboration of a long-term tourism strategy. The Amazon tourism revenue should stay within the communities.

**A change of strategy for the improvement of tourism in the region should consider family oriented initiatives, reduction of mass tourism, offer of memorable experiences rather than of products**, concentration of efforts for the preservation of cultures and territories as well as a better distribution of profits to the communities.

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