

6.5 Viaggi del Ventaglio: Supporting Local Communities in the Dominican Republic



Description of Good Practice

Viaggi del Ventaglio, one of the leading Italian outbound and domestic tour operators, manages 40 hotels worldwide through its daughter company VentaClub. The company's commitment to sustainable development focuses not just on environmental management and performance in its hotels, but also on the environmental, social and economic conditions in receiving destinations and funds specific activities to improve the quality of life for local communities in these destinations.

In 1998, the company's president, Mr Bruno Colombo, decided to grant US\$1 per bed/night to the Dominican Ministry of Tourism, to help repair damage that resulted from Hurricane George, one of the most violent storms to hit the Caribbean in recent years. The hurricane devastated the Dominican Republic and severely affected the livelihoods of local people dependent on tourism.

The fund-raising operation began on 20 December 1998, with the opening of VentaClub Gran Dominicus and the establishment of an account called Contribución para Bayahibe de Viaggi del Ventaglio (Contributions for Bayahibe from Viaggi del Ventaglio). The contributions were paid into the account regularly by the company, on the basis of the number of bed/nights sold in each period.

Implementation

Contribution to this account lasted for one year and generated about US\$150,000. The money was used for two projects:

- Restoring and repainting local houses in Bayahibe: Most houses in Bayahibe were suffering from general decay before the hurricane worsened the situation, threatening a loss of the typical character that distinguishes this little fishing village. Part of the funds were used to restore and repaint 40 local houses in typical Dominican colours.
- Conservation and development of Saona Island: The island of Saona, located inside the Parque Nacional del Este in the Dominican Republic, represents a unique and beautiful, but delicate ecosystem, and is a favourite excursion for hotels located in the area. The main economic activities on the island are fishing and sales of handicrafts from Haiti. Ventaglio funds were used to reconstruct 63 houses in the village of Manojuan, which was badly damaged by Hurricane George, and to promote and develop local handicrafts, through small grants to local enterprises.



MR. COLOMBO MEETING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN BAYAHIBE

The funds raised by Ventaglio were directly managed by the Secretary of Tourism of the Dominican Republic, Mr Felix Jimenez. The two projects were selected by Mr Jimenez and Mr Colombo, and managed and implemented by the Ministry of Tourism of the Dominican Republic.

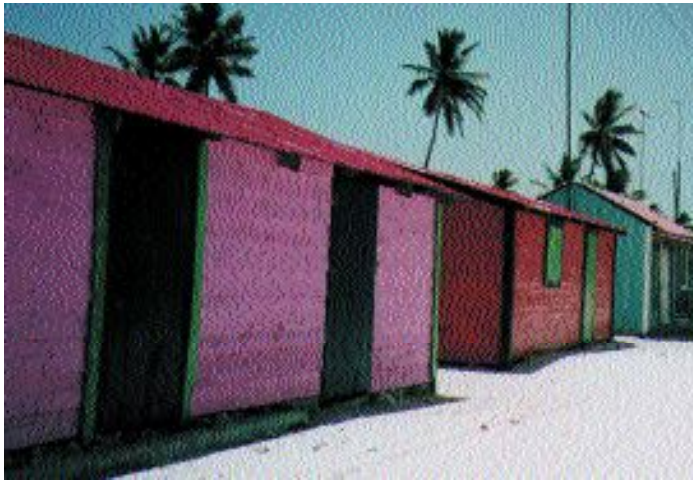
Benefits

This initiative has generated benefits for the local communities, tourists, Dominican authorities and the company:

- For the local communities, the reconstruction of more than 100 houses helped to improve their standard of living. In addition, the community of Saona has gained additional income and increased value of its cultural heritage through the stimulation of the local handicrafts market;
- For the tourists, a more attractive environment at these destinations means added value for their holidays;
- For the Dominican authorities, the project has meant a new partner for their rehabilitation efforts; and
- For the company, this action has strengthened its relationship with the local authorities, particularly the Ministry of Tourism.



RESTORED HOUSES IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



Comments

This initiative succeeded in part because concrete actions were identified and implemented in the areas where the company conducts its main operations. Although it was hoped that other companies might follow Ventaglio's example, this unfortunately did not occur.

An important lesson of this experience is that it is important to always deal with the same political contact point; change of personnel in the relevant ministries can slow down the process.