

## **Multi-level Ecotourism Project—La Piedra Community Tourism**

**Ecotourism Development, Adventure Tourism, Indigenous Caves and Caverns, and Community Tourism.** This multi-level project of sustainable, lasting development is organized to achieve the objectives of ever-growing community development within rural La Piedra and its surrounding communities, while simultaneously sustaining the capacity of the region's natural systems to provide the resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend.

The desired outcome is a situation wherein living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the delicate integrity and stability of the natural karst system that underlies the region.

We have a specific mission within the vision of Dr. Lynne Guitar, a North American Cultural Anthropologist and Historian, to raise the levels of economic activity and the well-being of the local population, while preserving their cultural identity as well as their fascinating karst ecosystems. Local residents are a mixture of ultra-poor, rural Dominicans and Haitians within what once was a vital source of Native Taíno drinking water. Our ultimate goal is to strengthen municipal capacities to promote sustainable and competitive ecotourism that will sustain a healthy income for local residents and improve the overall well-being of the community.

Leaders of the project will be responsible for preserving natural resources such as the crystalline drinking water found within the region's many caves and their underground lakes and rivers. This is a unique and beautiful environment. We plan to educate the community with a variety of craft courses and language courses (English, French, German and others), training residents as ecotourism guides who will escort and educate visitors about the region's culture, agriculture, and special attractions, including all the many majestic caves and underwater resources that characterize their karst terrain. These educational and guidance activities are aimed at generating sustainable employment for the multitude of otherwise jobless local residents throughout La Piedra and its surrounding communities.

**Tourism of Indigenous Caves— Community Ecotourism.** We have four (4) options or modalities for tourists and visiting students to learn about the community and also visit the caves and caverns.

A) Walking, B) Off-Road Biking, C) Driving Four-Wheelers. D) Kayaking.

In some of our caves we have spelunking activities available that consist of making guided descents with specialized equipment into grottoes, underground lakes and rivers, and passages full of sparkling stalactites, stalagmites, curtains, columns, and flow formations, as well as some passages with ancient Indigenous Taíno pictographs and petroglyphs, as well as the fascinating underground flora and fauna. Caving is a discipline that has multiple research and scientific purposes as well as recreational purposes, all of which fosters a deeper appreciation of Nature's wonders. Want to cool off in the underground pools? We can do that, too.

**Community Educational Tourism** is considered to be the human side of alternative tourism, since this segment offers the opportunity that is given to tourists and visiting students to mix and live within our rural communities. In this way, they can learn and come to know other ways of daily life in their familial, productive, and cultural aspects, hopefully sensitizing them to respect and value the cultural identity of these rural communities and people. Most of our visitors are delighted to find out how happy, friendly, and helpful the people of these communities can be. And we're sure you'll learn to share their love of music, dance, baseball, basketball, and dominos.

**All excursions begin at the La Piedra Community Center—the Guanín Foundation—and they all include round-trip transportation, plus snacks, meals, and overnight stays, if required.**

Here are your options:

**a) Walking.** This activity is one of the most popular. The walking circuits are well established and where you walk depends upon whether the tourists or visiting students are mostly children, youths, adults, or seniors. All participants will have the opportunity to know and share the geological wonders inside the caves, other natural sites in the region, and will get to know the community's people and culture.

**b) Off-Road (All-Terrain) Bicycles.** This means of transport is also well established and the circuits depend upon whether the tourists or visiting students are children, youths, adults, or seniors, and upon

how large or small the group is. These cross-country tours use off-road (all-terrain) bicycles, since they take place on dirt roads with gaps and narrow paths, requiring varying degrees of technical difficulty and physical effort. All participants will have the opportunity to know and share the geological wonders inside the caves, swimming at our nearest Caribbean beach or rivers, and other natural sites in the region, as well as to get to know the community's people and culture.

- 1) Beach Route: La Piedra/La Caleta National Park
- 2) Route of rivers, *bateyes* (sugar-mill communities), valleys and mountains: La Piedra/Bayaguana

**c) ATVs (4-Wheel All-Terrain Vehicles).** Like the off-road bicycles, this means of transport is also well established and the circuits depend upon whether the tourists or visiting students are children, youths, adults, or seniors, and upon how large or small the group is. These cross-country tours use off-road 4-Wheel ATVs, both one-person and two-person vehicles, since they take place on dirt roads with gaps and narrow paths, requiring varying degrees of technical difficulty and physical effort. All participants will have the opportunity to know and share the geological wonders inside the caves, swimming at our nearest Caribbean beach or rivers, and other natural sites in the region, as well as to get to know the community's people and culture.

- 1) Beach Route: La Piedra/La Caleta National Park
- 2) Route of rivers, *bateyes* (sugar-mill communities), valleys, and mountains: La Piedra/Bayaguana

**d) Kayaking combined with Community Tourism.** A combined activity for the whole family or group, this is a combination of land and sea. After a tour of the community of La Piedra and its fabulous caves, you will go kayaking on a beach or river. Our hydrodynamically-designed boats, with one or two seats, are easily controlled in moving waters, still waters, or in the sea. This tour is perfect for those looking for community tourism plans, for those who want to try new sports in safe environments, or for those who want to live with nature, not just read a book and get a tan in the tropical sun.

- 1) Beach Route: La Piedra/La Caleta Nacional Park
- 2) Route of River and Beach: La Piedra/Savannah of the Sea

### **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY & ECOTOURISM TOUR DETAILS:**

With a tour of two (2) hours, we offer visits to five (5) different caves or caverns with stunning geological formations, natural underground pools and rivers, a multitude of stalactites, stalagmites, curtains, columns, and flow formations; and several of the caves also have ancient Taíno Indian pictographs and petroglyphs. We also offer visits to nearby *bateyes* (sugar-mill communities), rivers, streams, and mountains. Visitors will get to know the surrounding communities, and will share and play with the children of the Guanín Foundation in La Piedra. Additionally, they will have the opportunity to contribute to community projects, such as painting a house, changing the dirt floor to cement for a low-resource family, and participating in home visits, community medical services, or playing sports such as baseball or basketball games with the local residents.

### **MARKETING:**

These Sustainable/Community Ecotourism program packages will be marketed with the help of hotels surrounding the tourist pole of Boca Chica as well as the hotels of Santo Domingo, and we will use social media such as our own websites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linked-in, local schools, and universities, as well as international schools and special-interest groups, and, of course, we will also promote our programs via national and international travel agencies.

### **Equipment needed to begin the Sustainable/Community Ecotourism programs:**

#### **Short term:**

- 1) Ten all-terrain bikes, with their 10 protective helmets.
- 2) Five 4-wheelers (4-wheel ATVs) with capacity for two persons, with their 10 protective helmets.

- 3) Two all-terrain engines.
- 4) Ten kayaks with two seats each, plus 20 safety vests and 20 protective helmets.
- 5) Ten helmet protectors with ultraviolet lights to explore the caves.
- 6) One trailer to transport the bicycles and 4-wheelers.
- 7) One Diesel F250 van with 4 doors and a long bed.

**Equipment to develop the routes: La Piedra/Bayaguana and La Piedra/Savannah of the Sea.**

**Medium term:**

- 1) Develop the ecotourism route La Piedra/Bayaguana; route for 4-wheelers and off-road bicycles up rivers, mountains, and to *bateyes* (sugar mill communities) and valleys, day trip.
- 2) Develop the ecotourism route La Piedra/Sabana de la Mar; route for kayaks, rivers, and beaches, one night and two-day excursion.
- 3) Equipment to perform caving that consists of making descents into caves, underground waterways, and caverns with diving equipment to better appreciate the different geological structures, flora, and fauna.