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Projektstart „Transforming Tourism“ – Nachhaltiger Tourismus in Costa Rica und der Dominikanischen Republik

KATE Umwelt & Entwicklung e.V., the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, the Global Nature Fund, and TourCert gGmbH are pleased to announce the launch of the joint project “Transforming Tourism.”. Through the promotion of sustainable tourism development, the project contributes to the protection of valuable ecosystems while simultaneously strengthening local value creation in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. Both countries are considered biodiversity hotspots due to their unique flora and fauna. In recent years, growing numbers of travelers have sought to experience this natural richness. At the same time, increasing tourism flows have placed additional pressure on the environment, for example through higher waste generation and increased resource consumption. Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to a sudden collapse of tourism in both countries, the social, environmental, and especially economic challenges remain and have, in many respects, become even more urgent than before. The project will run until December 31, 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted tourism with unprecedented challenges. Almost overnight, the entire sector came to a standstill. Since tourism supports one in every ten jobs worldwide, the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people were suddenly put at risk. As highlighted in the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) briefing paper “Tourism and COVID-19,”[1] current developments demonstrate more clearly than ever the need for environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable and resilient tourism structures.This is precisely where the “Transforming Tourism” project begins. The initiative supports three destinations as models for *sustainable development and biodiversity conservation* through targeted destination management strategies. The project focuses, among other things, on: Diversifying tourism offerings, promoting resource-efficient and low-carbon domestic and regional tourism, supporting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)

Biodiversity and Tourism

Biodiversity and the ecosystem services provided by nature are essential for maintaining a high quality of life worldwide.The partner countries Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic are home to extraordinary biodiversity, including endemic species such as the rare Resplendent Quetzal (Pharomachrus mocinno), the Ricord's Iguana (Cyclura ricordii), and the Blue-winged Eighty-Eight Butterfly (Myscelia aracynthia).This rich biodiversity fulfills vital ecosystem functions and also represents a key tourism attraction, thereby securing local livelihoods for many people directly and indirectly employed in tourism. For the tourism industry, sustainable development is of particular importance, especially because the sector itself significantly contributes to global challenges such as climate change, environmental pollution, and resource depletion while simultaneously being heavily affected by their consequences. Becoming sustainable and biodiversity-friendly in tourism is not simple. It requires not only new methods but also a fundamentally new way of thinking — a genuine transformation of tourism. Such a transformation can only succeed through collaboration among all stakeholders involved. This shared and committed effort toward a tourism transition forms the foundation of the project.

[1] https://unric.org/de/250820tourismus/

The Goal – Sustainable Tourism Development

At the beginning of the project, local partner organizations conducted workshops together with established sustainability councils and tourism businesses. In collaboration with the German partners, they developed a comprehensive action plan for the following two years. Measures planned within the project include: Climate-neutral pilot hotels Zero-waste approaches, Sustainable gastronomy, Eco-efficiency measures, Development of innovative, high-quality tourism products for regional, national, and international markets. The creation of network structures and the empowerment of destinations through knowledge transfer are intended to support a long-term transformation process.

The Project Starts with Three Destinations

Las Galeras is a fishing village located on the Samaná Peninsula in the Dominican Republic. It offers numerous beaches, dense tropical vegetation, and rich biodiversity across two protected natural areas.

The canton of **Sarapiquí** in Costa Rica encompasses important protected areas and national parks. Agriculture and eco-tourism are the region's main economic sectors.

The small town of **Sarchí** is the center of Costa Rican handicrafts, featuring numerous family-run artisan businesses and high biodiversity.

All three destinations hold TourCert certification and are positioning themselves for the future through sustainability councils, partner businesses, and agile network structures.

Working Together for Tourism Transformation

The project is implemented by a consortium consisting of KATE Umwelt & Entwicklung e.V., the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, and the Global Nature Fund in cooperation with TourCert gGmbH.

Partner organizations in the destination countries include Grupo RBA in Costa Rica and the Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral (IDDI) in the Dominican Republic.

The project also works closely with local sustainability councils in all three destinations.

"Transforming Tourism" is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and runs until the end of 2022.

Contact
Jana Zieger
Email: jana.zieger@kate-stuttgart.org
Phone: +49 (0) 711 / 248397-25
KATE Umwelt & Entwicklung e.V.
Blumenstraße 19 | 70182 Stuttgart Germany | www.kate-stuttgart.org