



## Summary Overview of Costa Rica – Bhutan Sustainable Community Development Project

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By: Julie Thorner, WillowWorks – marketing partner for Rios Tropicales

Media Contact: [julie@willowworks.bz](mailto:julie@willowworks.bz), 828-488-3420 (USA)

Project Manager and Main Contact: Rafael Gallo, President, Rios Tropicales - Email: [rgallo@riostropicales.com](mailto:rgallo@riostropicales.com), Phone: 506-2233-6455 (Costa Rica)

### Project Title:

Rural Adventure Tourism Enhancement and Sustainable Community Development in Bhutan and Costa Rica

### Region of the world:

Latin America and Caribbean

### Country Locations:

Bajo del Tigre, Costa Rica

Rios Tropicales is leading a sustainable community development project in Bajo del Tigre, Costa Rica, to provide income, jobs, education, and international exposure & collaboration for the community members.

### Partner Organizations:

#### 1. Fundecooperacion

Fundecooperacion is the funding partner for phase 1 of Bajo del Tigre Sustainable Community Development Project. Fundecooperación finances sustainable tourism initiatives in order for communities to take advantage of natural, social and cultural resources of their surrounding areas. It promotes and spreads new ways of tourist operations that contribute to sustainable development. Fundecooperación finances projects to owners of lands that have tourist potential, to owners of operating tourist activities, to local or international foundations and organizations, to private tourist companies, which support community groups regarding productive projects, and to local governments.

#### 2. ABTO

The Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO) is partnering with Rios Tropicales to replicate lessons learned from adventure recreation operations within a sustainable community development framework. As lead agency partner for the development of rural tourism, specifically rafting adventure tourism in Bhutan, Rios will teach, train, share, and collaborate with Bhutan’s teams about Rios’ best practices developed over 25 years of successful rafting adventure operations. In addition, Rios will support Bhutan’s early development of sustainable communities via sharing lessons learned from its ongoing work with Bajo del Tigre.



### 3. EARTH University

EARTH University is our partner providing key support for our rainforest restoration project, located next to the Bajo del Tigre community in a 2000 acre private reserve. Earth University brings volunteer groups and students to plant trees, along with providing low cost native tree species for planting. This joint program with Rios Tropicales educates residents and guests on importance of the rainforest in our larger eco-system and how restoration of deforested parts plays a vital role in long term planet health.

#### Main Activities:

Bajo del Tigre is a small rural community of 100 members (25 families) located in the Caribbean region of Costa Rica, two miles from Rios Tropicales' eco-lodge on the Pacuare River. Rios Tropicales is partnering with the community members to develop sustainable tourism initiatives that the community manages. The tourists will come from the existing rafting adventure tourism industry on the Pacuare River. Our initial funding from Fundecooperacion provides the foundation for project development. Bajo del Tigre will be eligible for the Blue Flag for Educational Centers, and for Community, due to this project. Support from the SEED Initiative would facilitate additional education and infrastructure to develop Bajo del Tigre into a model rural Climate Neutral Community. The Year 1 initiatives will provide income, jobs, education, and international collaboration for the community through the following:

1. Serpentarium: An educational snake exhibit of local rainforest species.
2. Orchid Garden: Expansion of a small private orchid garden into a robust attraction.
3. Butterfly Garden: A popular attraction, with commercial applications possible.
4. Internet Café Bajo del Tigre: Offers sustainable revenue source and international collaboration opportunities.
5. Environmentally sustainable bathrooms at the Bajo del Tigre School.
6. Expansion of the Tilapia sustainable fish farming project; additional commercial applications to other river lodges are possible.

#### Environmental, Social, and Economic Impacts:

There are several key benefits to this Bajo del Tigre project that include environmental, social, and economic impacts to the community.

1. The partnership, collaboration with decision-making responsibility, and financial benefits through ownership of attractions will fully invest the Bajo del Tigre team in the success of the project. The project funding is the critical support for the sustainable development of existing hobbies/interests into attractions and entrepreneurial activities that can generate revenue for operator/ owners. These community members benefit economically, socially, and educationally from their efforts, including increased self-esteem, retention of jobs and lower rural flight.



2. The internet café will provide new income source for Bajo del Tigre with useful and desired benefits to both community and tourist visitors. The café would be owned and operated by women in the community, thus providing a needed income source AND equality of purchasing power, higher self-esteem, and more confidence. The cafe will also be a particularly relevant opportunity for children to experience their parents successfully managing a rural, sustainable business.
3. Increase health services to school children, teachers, and guests with eco-friendly, modern bathrooms. These facilities will also help educate the community on the importance of safe, environmentally responsible waste management practices.
4. Once the first phase of the Bajo del Tigre project is operating, production of organic and natural produce for commercial sale can begin, adding more economic benefit to the community.

### **How Is This Project Innovative and Entrepreneurial?**

Rios Tropicales didn't have to care about the community that lives above its rainforest ecolodge on the banks of the Pacuare River. But, from day one the founders of Rios Tropicales made their tour operations follow sustainable community business practices. The Rios Tropicales Lodge is a limited job source for nearby Bajo del Tigre's subsistence families. Rios saw a need for economic opportunities that preserve, enhance, and educate both visitors & community members. It was possible thanks to the tourist market on the Pacuare River. Bringing its entrepreneurial skills and experience to bear, Rios is partnering with Bajo del Tigre to create tangible benefits in the rainforest. El Tigre is a non-profit project with all community business attractions fully owned by community members. Rios does not have any investment or ownership stake in any of the new attractions being developed in El Tigre.

### **How and When Will the Project Be Financially Sustainable?**

Bajo del Tigre will be financially sustainable within two years of opening and operating the exhibits and the internet café. The ready-made tourist market from the rafting industry on the Pacuare ensures a steady visitor population to this tiny and otherwise remote rainforest community. The combination of sustainable community development that is near large-scale adventure recreation is a win-win for communities, and the only way the project can be financially viable long term. All outfitters have a chance to market to their guests the opportunity to visit to a sustainable rural development project while adventure vacationing on the Pacuare River.