Studienkreis
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»TO DO Award« goes to Ecuador and India

»Community Tourism Yunguilla« and »Fernweh Fair Travel – Uplifting Communities« receive the TO DO Awards 2024 | Both are model projects of "responsible management of natural resources" | Socially responsible tourism opens up future perspectives

Seefeld, 14/02/2024 – This year, the internationally renowned award for socially responsible tourism goes to the project »Community Tourism Yunguilla« in Ecuador and to »Fernweh Fair Travel – Uplifting Communities« in India. With the TO DO Award the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung) has since 1995 honoured initiatives which enable local people to participate and have a say in tourism projects and products. Both winners meet the award criteria in an exemplary manner. They provide models of development and change in the context of tourism and encounters.

»Community Tourism Yunguilla« – There are other ways!

For almost 30 years, the project »Community Tourism Yunguilla« has stood for continuous improvements in the living and working conditions of an entire village community through tourism. From the beginning, the initiators of the project had declared the „responsible use of natural resources" to be their core concern. The success of the project is due not least to the approach of actively involving the entire community and their social environment in the region in the planning and implementation – and in the proceeds and the project's further development.

Over the past three decades, the around 250 inhabitants of the village have succeeded in stopping the rampant overexploitation of the surrounding forests and have gradually reforested the area. They also took other effective measures to protect the environment and resources, so that the area has now developed into an attractive destination for ecotourism. It has also become part of the UNESCO biosphere reserve

"Chocó Andino de Pichincha".

Yunguilla is located in a cloud forest region of the Andes. Thanks to the successful efforts over the past few years, the village is once again surrounded by about 8,000 hectares of forest, boasting of a huge diversity of species. In this environment, visitors are offered excursions on historic Inca trails or guided tours through the cloud forest – as one-day excursions or longer stays over several days. During home-stay programmes, guests can get immersed in the reality of life in the village community. By staying with different families, sharing meals and being part of the daily routines, visitors learn about and appreciate the responsible use of natural resources, and the villagers' authentic and warm hospitality.

»Fernweh Fair Travel – Uplifting Communities« addresses marginalisation

The second TO DO Award 2024 goes to »Fernweh Fair Travel – Uplifting Communities« in the region of Gopeshwar-Chamoli in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. Fernweh Fair Travel offers immersive comfort-luxury tours in the Himalayas, an area marked by an enormous diversity of flora and fauna which includes several wildlife protection areas. The valleys are mainly used for agriculture, trout farming and pilgrim. Over the past few years, the region has also become attractive for trekking, bird watching and wellness (yoga & various forms of meditation).

The founder of Fernweh Fair Travel is originally from this traditional and conservative region but has lived in different places, every 3 years she moved to a new place. Poverty and marginalisation are prevalent in many parts of the region. The mission and vision of the project has been to create job opportunities for women mainly widows and victims of domestic violence who are poor in economic terms while providing unforgettable and transformational experiences to the guests. There had hardly been any such jobs in this region which would enable them to earn their livelihoods.

The founder recognised the region's tourism potential, thanks

to its scenic beauty and distinctive culture. She started by sensitizing local people for the project's mission. Women in particular were to be involved, so that they would become more independent and get more social recognition. The process took several years until politicians, villagers, and religious dignitaries could be convinced. Eventually, the entire region of Gopeshwar-Chamoli villages were involved in the decision-making on how tourism should be developed – participation in practice.

Step by step, accommodation was put in place, various immersive experiences were curated, and traditional meals were prepared for the guests. The participants were also trained in handling guests. The main components of the services offered are the home-stays and boutique farm retreat for individual travellers and groups. The skills people acquired have since been passed on within the families and the community. Part of the profit is used to support environment, schools and community projects. By now, more than 557 people, most of them women, are able to sustain their livelihoods thanks to the income from tourism.

Claudia Mitteneder, Managing Director of Studienkreis: "The two projects meet the criteria of the TO DO Award in an almost exemplary manner. The success of both projects shows that firstly, socially responsible tourism can be economically viable also in the long term. Secondly, it proves that successful examples can serve as models in other parts of the world. And that is what our contest is all about".

The TO DO Award ceremony will take place on 6 March 2024 at 18:00 on the eTravel stage in Hall 6.1 of ITB Berlin, followed by a networking event. In addition to TO DO award, the winner of the "TO DO Award Human Rights in Tourism" will also be honoured.

The Institute for Tourism and Development at ITB 2024: Hall 4.1, stand 201

Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung (Institute for Tourism and Development) focuses on development related information and

education in tourism. In this context it brings out publications, organises international contests, offers training and seminars for people employed in the tourism sector, carries out tourism research and consultancy, and is involved in dialogue on issues related to tourism development.

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