Title of the Story: Tiny Treasure at the foot of the Andes

Destination Name:
“BAGGILT LAKE” NATURAL PROTECTED AREA, Chubut Province

Country: Argentina

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Nomination Category:
- [ ] Localizing the destination supply chain
- [x] Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- [ ] Culture & Communities
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Issues faced

Since 2003, Baguilt Lake is a Natural Protected Area. It is a small mountain lake in Chubut province (Argentine Patagonia), located at the foot of the impressive Mount Cónico and the feeding water of its glacier. This Area was created to protect the fauna and a very important forest of native species of the Patagonic Andes, such as lengas, ñires and coihues, victims of forestry exploitation for years. Located 1100 meters above sea level, the surrounding biodiversity of Lake Baguilt has exclusive and very different characteristics from other lakes in the area, while offering visitors a scenery of exuberant beauty and a pristine environment at the foot of the Andes.

For more than ten years, the Area was occasionally visited only by the authorities in charge of protection. Without any infrastructure, access was very difficult, and staff used different means to travel the harsh access road with steep slopes. Visitors were scarce.

Methods, steps and tools applied

With the purpose of monitoring the site, in 2016 a wildlife ranger with experience in mountain environments was hired. This allowed a more effective control over the area and, at the same time, provide safety guidance to visitors, who are advised about possible trekking paths, based on physical and environmental conditions, and conservation practices implemented in the area.

From 2016 to 2019, a one-room wooden house with minimal amenities was built on the site. Being equipped to operate with clean energy (solar panels and hot water tank), a wood stove, and a natural water supply. An emergency generator occasionally works for a few hours a day, as sunlight is harnessed intensively. Until 2015, vehicles used to reach the shore of the lake, with the evident noise and environmental pollution, in addition to the damage caused to the precarious road. Today, the ranger parks his vehicle 8 kilometers from the house, and then drives a UTV along the remaining uneven path. Visitors park their vehicles 1.5 kilometers from the lake in the summer and up to 7.5 kilometers in the winter (white gate in the graph), traveling the rest of the way on foot, as the road is blocked by snow and/or floods from streams.

This leads visitors to bring light luggage, minimizing waste and noise, and preventing vehicular tracks. Visitors are informed about the need and obligation to take any waste generated as they leave the area.
Key success factors

It is worth noting that since the creation of the Baggilt Lake’s Protected Natural Area, tree felling has stopped, and conservation and responsible tourism are promoted. A protected area is then created without the permanent presence of a ranger, and with a low budget preventing equipment supply and infrastructure for visitors and field staff. The solution comprised developing the area as a model tourist destination, where a simple way of life contributes to conservation of the site at a low operating cost. A change in mentality, so that Lake Baggilt develops in harmony with nature, preserving the ecosystem with minimal services.

The community benefits by expanding its offer with a different recreational site in a protected environment throughout the season. The absence of cell phone or internet signal causes visitors to experience a sense of disconnection during their visit, with all senses focused in the enjoyment of the environment and companionship with those sharing the experience.

Visitor types diversify every year. Many families arrived during last season, in addition to mountaineers or trekkers. Visits are allowed only for daytime both in the lake sector and in the refuge, since the management plan does not permit overnight stays. High season runs from January to March, while the season lasts from November to May. Last seasons’ visitor data show an increase year by year (2019-2020 is an odd season, due to the Covid-19 pandemic).
**Lessons learned**

The laying of the foundations for tourism development at the Lake Baguilt’s Natural Protected Area, with a limited budget for staff and infrastructure, has undoubtedly been a challenge and a rewarding achievement. It was determined that this site would show a way of life harmonious with nature, where the wildlife ranger sets the example, inspiring visitors to make changes in their way of life to be less aggressive with the environment and, at the same time, find true value in the simple things.

**Results, achievements and recognitions**

A supervising presence in the area has been achieved for the snow-free season (November-May) to receive small groups of visitors, eager for a unique experience in close contact with the purest nature.

**Additional references**

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.

We invite you to watch the video attached.