



2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Conservation of heritage and local identity in the Patagonia Verde of Chaitén

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Chaitén

Country: Chile

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Position: Encargada de Fomento Productivo

Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

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- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery
- Other

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DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

The history of Chaitén is marked by the efforts of its people. On May 2, 2008, the Chaitén Volcano erupted and caused enormous damage, destroying an important part of the city.

The volcano brought with it desolation, uncertainty, worry and fear. It affected many families who lost everything due to the overflow of the Blanco River. Added to the loss of structural assets was that of farm animals that were abandoned or taken to safety zones, especially in the case of livestock.

The Government at the time supported the affected and displaced families with the payment of bonds so that they could start again, created special subsidy tools and began to promote the reconstruction of the city to make it habitable and guarantee the replacement of basic services and the construction of new homes for those who lost them.

Once the eruption occurred, studies were carried out that showed that the volcano was inactive thousands of years ago, which is why what happened in 2008 became the first record of activity by the Global Volcanism Program of the Smithsonian Institution.

Today the reality is different. The Chaitén volcano, located almost 10 kilometers from the city, is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the area. In addition, many families returned to live in this wonderful territory of Patagonia Verde, undertaking tourism services.

All this has meant an even greater commitment to the conservation of local ways of life and the understanding of natural heritage, in the commune with the largest area of protected areas in Chile.

Two examples are key in this new awakening of Chaitén. The first of them has to do with the "Cuevas del Vilcún". For many years the inhabitants of Chaitén knew of the existence of caves in the hill "El Vilcún". Inhabitants who walked from the Chana or Camahueto sectors to Chaitén did so along the beach, since there was no road and, as a result of the continuous variations of the weather and the constant rains, they took refuge in these caves, without really knowing the value of this place. .

As of 2011, the scientific studies of the site begin. First, the archaeologists F. Mena, R. Labarca and A. Prieto, try to give answers to these records for the first time: 47 red paintings and nine engravings along with some other evidence, such as bones and ceramics, that would have been made by groups canoeists, at least 800 years ago.

Later, in 2018, a team led by the American archaeologist Karen Holmberg, in a project funded by National Geographic, made new finds and allowed a complete 3D mapping of the caves.

These cave paintings and engravings are unique and these archaeologists assure that they are the first records of rock art on the Chilean coast of Northern Patagonia. However, this greater diffusion also meant greater interest from visitors who do not have the proper respect to enjoy this archaeological remains with minimal impact.



The second example takes place in the Huequi Peninsula. This place is surrounded by rugged geography, spectacular fjords, impenetrable forests, incredibly varied fauna, ancient flora, and a largely unexplored cultural wealth.

*Historically, the economic activities that have been developed in the Huequi Peninsula have always lacked sustainability. The main economic activity at the beginning of the 20th century was the exploitation of Larch (*Fitzroya cupressoides*), an endemic tree of southern Chile and Argentina, extraordinarily long-lived (more than 3000 years), and with a wood whose qualities and textures were highly valued in the international market.*

In the late 1990s, salmon farming farms were established in the fjords and bays that surround the Huequi Peninsula. For 10 years the activity brings economic benefits to these towns, but due to the appearance of infectious salmon anemia (ISA) these farms massively abandoned the entire region moving to more southern waters, causing unemployment and economic decline, in addition to a significant impact environmental.

Both examples give way to the creation of a series of mechanisms that seek to protect heritage and diversify the local economy.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Municipality of Chaitén, through its Department of Culture, is awarded in 2020 financing from the National Fund for Cultural Development and the Arts FONDART, which is delivered and is administered by the Government's Undersecretariat of Cultures and Arts of Chile.

The idea of having this financing is the enhancement and protection of the site through design and participatory work between the municipality, the local community of the town of Santa Bárbara and an interdisciplinary team from the Universidad Austral de Chile, who seek to reveal not only the "Cuevas del Vilcún" and its cave paintings, but also its environment, its coastal edge, its history, its biodiversity, projecting a sustainable development based on the knowledge and appropriation of this natural heritage by the local community.

The project includes the construction of an Interpretive Center, an interpretive trail and a long-term management model installed for this important initiative. In addition, rural schools and students who are in the vicinity of the archaeological site "Cuevas del Vilcún" are involved with the participation in archeology workshops formulated by professionals from the Universidad Austral de Chile, thus allowing the valuation, appropriation, protection and diffusion with a sense of conservation of heritage.

*In the case of the community of the Huequi Peninsula, a social and environmental phenomenon was generated worthy of replicating in other territories of Chile. On April 16, 2020, the Chilean Government's Undersecretariat for Fisheries and Aquaculture proposed catchment areas for mytilidae (*Mytilus chilensis*) seeds, in waters of the Chaitén commune, and mainly in the fjords that surround the Peninsula. of Huequi.*

The proposal consisted of 1024 hectares, distributed in smaller polygons, throughout the commune, but mainly in the Reñihué fjord, the gateway to the Pumalin Douglas Tompkins Park, and where the town of Caleta Buill, one of the oldest in Chaitén, is located.

The Undersecretary of Fisheries and Aquaculture, proposed the capture and cultivation of mitilidae, as the solution to the problem of local economic activities that generate income and economic development for the communities of Chaitén.

However, due to its enormous extension, the community understood that this was a very dangerous turn for the sustainability of the place, since mythiculture generates very high visual and residual pollution.

It is during this process that the community of the Huequi Peninsula comes together to stop this economic proposal, and it is where the conservation of the environment, ancestral traditions and the opportunity for sustainable development based on tourism, becomes the main challenge.

Thus, on November 2, 2020, the Buill Indigenous Community, with the support of the Komau de Huequi Indigenous Community, presented a formal request to the Undersecretary of Fisheries and Aquaculture, for the creation of a Coastal Marine Space of Indigenous Peoples (ECMPO) called "Weki - Wil", with the technical and legal advice of the Municipality of Chaitén, neighboring indigenous communities and the transversal support of the community in general, with the maxim of protecting the environment from the activities industrial pollutants, for the benefit of initiating a process of economic transformation focused on tourism, as the opportunity to protect, conserve and actively undertake towards sustainability.

Key success factors

At a general level, the first success factor and key to achieving progress in each of these initiatives is the collaborative work between the Municipality of Chaitén, the organized local community and the academy, exemplified in the Austral University of Chile, since from a At the beginning there was scientific interest in discovering the origin of the "Cuevas del Vilcún" complex.

The participation and interest of the community in general, especially the community of Santa Bárbara, who are fortunate to have this heritage in their sector, was a significant element for wanting to care for and protect these caves and their history, which give account of the original ways of life of Chaitén, their subsistence strategies, the meaning of their rock art and the uses they gave to the rocks of the Chaitén volcano.

In the case of the Huequi Peninsula, the vision of the local community to conserve the natural wonders of its environment, the technical support of the Municipality of Chaitén and the help from other communities was key so that on May 28, 2021, The Undersecretary of Fisheries and Aquaculture, issued Exempt Resolution No. 1680 that welcomes the application for the creation of a Coastal Marine Space for Indigenous Peoples (EMCPO) of the Indigenous Community of Buill, which totally stops any attempt to concession or installation of industrial activities in this area, concluding the first stage for the protection of the territory.

Lessons learned

In the first place, progress must be made even faster in dissemination measures regarding the care of heritage in the Chaitén commune. It should be considered a priority to show the community the benefits of conservation, what kinds of activities may be feasible to carry out and which ones should be prohibited.

The Chaitén community has been trying to migrate to environmentally sustainable economic activities for some years, so the development of tourism and more specifically ecotourism, has gained strength recently. The coastal edge of the commune is an area of potential development for this activity, currently important tourist circuits are carried out by local operators, such as kayak routes through the Comau and Reñihué fjords, both fjords, are part of the proposal of seed catchment areas, so without a doubt, it would severely damage local tourist activity, especially considering the effort of the communities of the Chaitén commune, to migrate towards sustainable economic activities

And continue working together with the community and make them part of all the processes, to make Chaitén a

territory that can advance day by day towards more responsible tourism.

Results, achievements and recognitions

Thanks to the financing obtained, today Chaitén has a new offer of tourist attractions and experiences. An interpretive center has been built, improvements were made to a bridge that is part of the "Senderos de Chile" national project in order to be able to take the self-guided tour of Santa Bárbara beach, until reaching the "Cuevas del Vilcún" heritage site. In addition, signage has been installed and the trail has been considerably improved, moving towards inclusiveness in local tourism.

On the other hand, the Municipality of Chaitén has inaugurated a Communal Tourism Office for the Huequi Peninsula, taking into account the special situation of this community and the advances in coastal protection that they have achieved.

This office has started an information gathering and training program with the community, interested in developing sustainable enterprises based on tourism. In addition, the creation of a Chamber of Tourism has been promoted to bring together these entrepreneurs and thus train them in the delivery of tourist services of excellence.

Finally, it is working collaboratively with the SERNATUR National Tourism Service for the development of the Huequi Peninsula as a new destination within the Los Lagos region, identifying opportunities in marketing, technical and legal advice to advance towards the objective of converting the Huequi Peninsula is a national benchmark in terms of sustainable tourism, integral economic development, conservation, protection of the environment and protection of ancestral lifestyles.

The community of Chaitén today dreams of a better tomorrow and the memory of the eruption of the Chaitén Volcano and the destruction of the city gives renewed strength.

Additional references

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