Title of the Story: Recanto dos Balseiros: A historical rescue of the raftsman tradition of Itá

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Itá – Santa Catarina

Country: Brazil

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Position: Sustainability Coordinator

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)
- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery

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

Issues faced

The transmission of knowledge through story telling and teaching of handy work is an important way to preserve people’s culture. How many of us grew up listening to our grandparents telling stories about the start of the economic life in Itá/SC, that mister Nilo Celso Brand, tourismologist by formation, started researching about the Rio Uruguaí’s raftsman, trying to rescue the knowledge and the actions of these men and women that explored the region, and continue able to stay fixed on the earth that is his family’s origin.

Nilo’s inicial idea, after graduated on the tourism course, was to start a farm hotel on the property where he grew up and belongs to his family for five generations, to tell the visitors a little bit about the stories of his ancestors, because as time passed by it was getting lost. He started the research with his grandfather’s stories, who was a raftsman and have told Nilo’s lots of stories when he was a kid about their life on Rio Uruguaí’s.

That research was the start of a very important rescue on history and in culture about Itá’s life on the beginning of the XX century, also about the economy that hit all the region on that time: the exctraction of wood and the important job of the raftsman, making their rafts with that wood. A very culturally rich story, that got lost as the years passed by and got worst after the extinction of the raftsman’s profession on 1967. With the start of the civilization that today is Itá, leaded by the colonizing business Luce e Rosa, in 1920, families of Italian and german immigrants got settled around Rio Uruguaí’s. To survive, they need to open the virgin forest and prepare the land the plant supplies, but the hard life, with limited resources, made the man look for an alternative source of income. Looking at the huge Mata Atlantica’s area there at the time, where ceder and laurel, woods of high quality and durability were abundant, the extraction and commercialization of woods became the only possible income for the local families, who did not have any infrastructure like roads, tools or communication. After spending three months sailing on Rio Uruguaí’s and have identified twenty eight obstacles on the river, mister João Simon, great grandfather of Nilo Brand, was the pione of commercialization and transportation of the rafts made with Itá’s wood right to São Borja, giving a lot of jobs to men when the rivers were high, improving Itá’s economy.

Methods, steps and tools applied

As long he was rescuing his grandfather and great grandfather history, Nilo was discovering another raftsman that still lived in Itá and in the region and started to gather them for moments of talk and story telling about their livings on that profession, he called them “Rodas de Balseiros”. The time was passing and the gather of people was growing, bringing photographs and objects that the raftsman used at the time.

To keep the memories alive Nilo created a space to keep the objects and photographs that have been brought to him and there’s the creation of the “Museu do Balseiro”. The museum’s building is a replica
of Nilo’s great grandfather, João Simon. As long as the “Rodas de Balseiros” were happening it was getting a lot bigger than it was in the beginning, so they create a diner called “Restaurante Flösen Haus, that rescue the typical food prepared by raftsman on their travels on Rio Urugai: “feijoada” with pig’s knee without fat, fried pork meat with a lot of bones, pepperoni with cooked manioc and fried salami, and eggs with bacon, all cooked on wood for four hours tops.

In 2013 happened the first “Encontro de Balseiros”, festivity that reunites raftsman and familiars and where are realized a lot of activities to remind them of their culture, like:

- Walk in name of Saint Miguel Arcanjo, raftsman protector, followed by devotional miss;
- Music scene with students from municipal schools;
- Theater about raftsman’s wife’s lives (who run the property and the plantation on their husband’s absence;
- Typical lunch;
- Feast afternoon with music and dance.

The “Encontro de Balseiros” happens once a year, always on the Saturday closest to September 29th, day of Saint Miguel Arcanjo, that coincides with the period when Rio Urugai is full. All this actions culminated on the creation of “Recanto do Balseiro”, on “Linha Simon”, countryside of Itá, space dedicated to Rio Urugai’s raftsman culture, open to visitation.

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues? Click to add your text

The contribution of the old raftsman and their families on the rescue of the stories, costumes, objects and photographs was the fundamental factor to “Recanto dos Balseiros” existence. As well the support of the community of Itá made possible the creation and continuation of Rio Urugai’s raftsman history.

The knowledge of Santa Catarina’s state, through the Motion of Applause and commendation of the legislative Assembly motivated “Recanto do Balseiro” to continue the historical rescue started in 2007.

Lessons learned
While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome? Click to add your text

The first challenge was to create a tourism business that could be able to provide to Nilo’s family on his ancestors property, that was possible thank to the value given to the knowledge shared by his family, that resulted on a big historical research, valuing other people that lived Brazilian culture. The knowledge learned about the extraction and transportation of wood, the raftsman culinary, the many stories told by objects and photographs carefully received sorted, had become a very important touristic product of Itá and tell about the life of the people that helped to build the city.

Results, achievements and recognitions
What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice? Has it received any rewards? Click to add your text

The “Recanto dos Balseiros” receives near 300 people per month, to visit the museum and to lunch at the restaurant. The annual raftsman meeting gather near 4000 people from all parts of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, as well of the countries that have connection to their history, like Argentina and Uruguay.
In 2017, Nilo Celso Brand received from the legislative Assembly from Santa Catarina’s state a Motion of Applause for his history and work for the tourism development and history and culture preservation of Itá’s city and region.
In 2019, the legislative Assembly from Santa Catarina conceived to Rio Urugai’s raftsmen the commendation of the “Catarinense” legislative for their relevant services provided and actions in Santa Catarina.

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.

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