



2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Preservation of Natural and Built Cultural Heritage in Rewa Through the Community Led and Owned Tourism Framework

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

Rewa (North Rupununi, Region# 9)

Country: Cooperative Republic of Guyana

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Position: Director

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

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.

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

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".

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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 community of Rewa (North Rupununi, Region# 9) has had its fair share of issues/challenges which was addressed through the implementation of the Community Led and Owned Tourism (CLOT) good practice. Some of the issues faced within the community included:

1. The Preservation and Conservation of Threatened Wildlife Species (Arapaima).
2. Out-Migration & the Need for Sustained Development Assistance.

The Preservation and Conservation of Threatened Wildlife Species (Arapaima).

The preservation and conservation of the Arapaima fish species is paramount to the survival of the community of Rewa and is the main component of promoting sustainability and keeping the ecosystem balance in the entire Rupununi region. For years, this threatened species was seen as a main part of the culture for the people of the Rupununi region due to its years of existence, giving it the nickname: "a living dinosaur".

There was a great need to develop suitable management plans to ensure the long-term health of the species – tracking the migration patterns and breeding behaviours which were previously a mystery. The Community Led and Owned Tourism (CLOT) model led to the financial sustainability of this effort.

Several communities within the Rupununi location, including Rewa, have partnered with local stakeholders as well as international experts and organisations in developing a suitable Community Based Management Systems that have proven to be successful. Today, Rewa has seen an increase of over 4000+ Arapaima species within its location.

Out-Migration & the Need for Sustained Development Assistance.

Two other major issues that were addressed with the Good Practice were out-migration from indigenous communities and the need for focused development assistance.

Out-migration in Rewa (like many other indigenous communities) was as high as 80%, leaving behind the challenges of neglected family farms, and more importantly, families with absentee husbands and fathers. Although the economic situation may improve due to income producing jobs from outside of the community, it negatively affects many families, and by extension their communities. Hence, the need for alternative sources of income which can be derived through social enterprise development such as community-led and owned tourism enterprises.

The community of Rewa has experienced improved livelihoods, leadership skills development, increased pride in and protection of their cultural heritage, and enhanced ecosystem services through conservation – all through sustainable social enterprise development. However, these community-led and owned enterprises took many years to develop.

Multiple governmental agencies and donors have supported and invested in the establishment of community-based tourism enterprises in Guyana over the years. However, a focused methodology based on proven solutions and sustained support has been lacking.



Although out-migration and capacity constraints remain an issue, more communities (like Rewa) are embracing the use of the Guyana Community-led Tourism Framework and toolkit and seeing results.

Methods, steps and tools applied

In order to address the challenges faced by Rewa, the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) developed a Community Led and Owned Tourism (CLOT) Framework and toolkit in 2018 to establish a stepwise methodology to create Return on Investments (ROI) and sustained impact in prioritised indigenous communities. This was done in collaboration with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (MOAA). Leveraging combined budgetary resources will result in enterprise development in multiple communities throughout Guyana.

The GTA defines community-led and owned tourism (CLOT) as 'any Indigenous tourism enterprise owned and operated by the host community'. Unlike traditional community-based tourism, CLOT takes place when there is an interaction between an Indigenous host community and a traveller, leading to the sharing of an experience, product or service that has been created by a business or enterprise owned and operated by the community and benefits the community as a whole.

The Guyana CL&OT Framework involves a multi-phased approach and is inclusive of the following activities:

Activity 1: Readiness, Governance, and Action Planning. The purpose of Activity 1 is to assess each communities' readiness for tourism, establish a Tourism Committee, and support them in developing tourism development action plans. There are four sub-activities involved in this process. Stage 1 requires community awareness-raising through community engagement, information sharing and a self-assessment. Stage 2 consists of assessing community needs, governance, and the level of visitor readiness and market readiness. Assessing community tourism offerings provides the basis for identifying product development opportunities and support requirements, community capacity building needs and an action plan for implementation. This phase reflects a community-centric and market-responsive orientation that empowers communities to lead tourism development activities, attract visitors directly, and attract domestic and international travel intermediaries who have clients interested in community tourism experiences. Stage 3 involves facilitating the prioritisation of actions undertaken through a participatory process. Stage 4 includes completing a Market-Readiness Diagnosis and Market-Product Match. Visitor ready criteria are used to assess existing tourism products according to product and operational market readiness. This is followed by a market-led approach based on what target travellers want. The process utilises sustainable livelihood measures, market demand, product supply, and community values compatibility measures to assess the strength of the market-product match. In addition, competitive analysis is conducted, and ideal guest profiles are prepared. Throughout Activity 1 and the activities that follow, local trainers are trained to implement the Community-led and Owned Tourism Framework and toolkit.

Activity 2: Building Capacity through Centralised and Hands-on Training. The purpose of Activity 2 is to implement peer-to-peer and shadowing training to build capacity within beneficiary communities to lead tourism development. The MOAA and GTA lead the implementation of new and existing curriculum, including business accounting, management and marketing; reservations and bookings; hospitality and the visitor welcome; food safety and catering; and tour guiding and packaging. Training is undertaken with a lead tour guide, a caterer from



the MOAA, and staff from Surama Eco-lodge and Rewa Eco-lodge members. This activity includes the provision of support for becoming licensed by the GTA.

Activity 3: Developing Tourism Enterprises and Product. The purpose of Activity 3 is to develop tourism and package tourism experiences. This activity starts with undertaking an inventory of natural and tangible, and intangible cultural heritage assets, which leads to identifying what is sacred and what can be shared with outsiders and the establishment of Visitor Codes of Conduct that spell out the social mores, customs and rules that visitors are asked to follow. The next step is centered on developing tourism and packaging tourism experiences. It then leads to the establishment of either Private-Public-Community Partnerships and or joint ventures with tourism private sector companies to create new products, complete eco-lodges that are under development, refine existing products, and package new and existing offerings. Informed by the findings of the Market-Product Match in Activity 1 and the latest GTA Experiential Travel guidelines, community tourism enterprises and experiential travel products are developed, inclusive of business planning, and the packaging one-two full-day tours, four half-day tours or a combination of both.

Activity 4: Establishing Market Linkages. The purpose of Activity 4 is to establish market linkages for visitor ready products. This activity involves establishing market linkages and integrating market-ready products into the tourism value chain. The GTA helps communities secure direct market access through domestic and international tour operators in collaboration with the Tourism & Hospitality Association of Guyana and other partners to realise the potential. Emphasis is placed on developing peer-to-peer experiences such as home-stays, in-home dining and insider cultural experiences and securing market access through sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb, Airbnb Experiences, EatWith, Viator, and Traveling Spoon.

Activity 5: Marketing Community Tourism Offerings. The purpose of Activity 5 is to develop marketing strategic action plans and market visitor ready products. The GRA helps communities develop marketing strategic action plans. The GTA also leads marketing implementation activities. This activity includes promoting community tourism products that are visitor ready on the GTA website, through its social media channels, and through its market representatives in its core markets (United States, Canada, Germany and the UK). The GTA also coordinates familiarisation trips in communities with the media, international tour operators and social media influencers. The Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana and its members support these marketing activities as well.

Activity 6: Measuring and Communicating Outcomes. The purpose of Activity 6 is to implement a system to measure and report on the outcomes on an ongoing basis. During Activity 6, a tourism dashboard monitoring system is implemented to monitor, track, and report tangible results. The dashboard is designed to ensure transparency within the community so that the flow of monetary resources within the community is known to the Toshao and Village Council and shared with community members. To operationalise the system, members of the Tourism Committees are trained in the use and management of the system.

The decision to implement a community-led and owned tourism framework was a defining moment for Guyana's tourism sector. Adding new depth and diversity to the industry by embracing widespread community-led participation in tourism responds to global market trends and addresses the need for inclusion and community empowerment, and provides Guyana's tourism sector with a vehicle to help achieve national aspirations for becoming a Green State. As such, the social, economic and cultural benefits of a vibrant community tourism sector will serve Guyanese well for this and future generations.

The primary aim of CLOT was to create alternative livelihood opportunities for young people and women in Indigenous communities through the establishment of new sustainable community-led and owned tourism enterprises. This is fully aligned with Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS).



Key success factors

There have been ample opportunities to learn from the past, identify the various means for overcoming the myriad challenges involved in tourism development, and identify the top factors for success, which cannot be limited to three aspects:

- 1. Access & Visitor Flows. Affordable and reliable access via road or air is a prerequisite to the success of community tourism enterprises. Like-minded tourists make up strategic visitor flows that have predictable patterns, and that create tourism circuits. Strategic visitor flows must be evaluated to understand where existing visitors are coming from, where they are going, what they are doing when they get there, and what amounts they're spending on tourism activities, lodging, transportation, food and other services. Creating tourism products outside of the existing strategic visitor flows and tourism circuits is difficult unless the gateway communities have affordable and reliable access and unique product offerings or iconic attractions nearby.*
- 2. Government Commitment. Many community tourism ventures fail because of a lack of adequate funding and financial expertise on the person(s) managing community tourism. Financial budgeting, planning, and resource allocation need to be planned as part of the funding process. Aligning shared aims and resources through inter-ministerial collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, Ministry of Housing & Water, Ministry of Public Works, and Office of the Prime Minister partnerships between the tourism private sector and relevant government agencies are critical to the success of community tourism development in Guyana.*
- 3. Community Receptivity and Visitor Readiness. The Toshao, Village Council and entire community must first agree to initiate a community-owned and managed enterprise and be open to hosting visitors. Once the community is receptive, the level of community readiness should be assessed. In Guyana, visitor ready means the tourism business is fully prepared to welcome customers and offer them a safe, quality and memorable experience. This means that community members have received the necessary training. The community tourism business should be accessible via radio, phone, or the internet. Visitors should feel welcomed and should be able to engage in a half to a full day of activities at a minimum. Activities should have minimal impact on the environment and provide an authentic representation of living culture and heritage. Good tasting and filling meals should be offered and should include a variety of dishes. Reliable transportation should be made available through the use of the community's vehicle or a taxi service. If accommodation is offered, it must meet basic international standards and be clean and comfortable.*
- 4. Commitment to Self Help. Communities have traditionally received financial and technical support for a limited time. Poorly scoped community tourism development initiatives, underfunded projects, and lack of the requisite capacity within the beneficiary communities have led to a high failure rate. The Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) role is to support communities throughout the tourism development process and help them meet basic standards for visitor readiness in the areas of safety, quality, and sustainability. The GTA and MOAA act in the capacity of facilitators, guiding to inform community-level decision making, training to build local capacity, and financial assistance to underwrite the costs through the start-up phase of enterprise development. Notably, the beneficiary communities have to agree to "self-help". That is, they must volunteer and invest their time in ensuring the success of their tourism enterprise. This approach engenders shared accountability, empowers communities and fosters self-reliance.*
- 5. Peer-to-Peer Training & Mentoring. Most community members have never been tourists or operated tourism companies. Therefore, the GTA and MOAA must provide a series of training in customer service, catering, financial management, bookings and reservations management, managing tours in progress, and other related areas. This is typically followed by peer-to-peer training. Community members from Rewa and Surama visit the new community enterprises, provide the Tourism Committee, and select residents with hands-on training. This is often*



followed by job shadowing training. Wilderness Explorers, Guyana's only Destination Management Company, hosts community members and provides in-office training that lasts for a week or more.

6. Independent Tourism Committee & Financial Transparency. Having an active Tourism Committee in place is critical. The village owns the tourism enterprise. There is a separate standing tourism committee selected by the Village Council or community to operate the tourism business on behalf of the Village Council. The Tourism Committee is entirely responsible for all matters regarding the operations of the community tourism enterprise and the management of the income generated by tourism. This includes salaries, maintenance, infrastructure, transportation and paying all taxes and fees due to the Village Council. The work of the Tourism Committee should be fully aligned with the rules governing the community. All income generated by tourism should be deposited into a separate account designated explicitly for tourism. The Village Council is solely responsible for how the fees and taxes received from the Tourism Committee are spent, and the community usually votes on how the monies are spent. The Tourism Committee is answerable to the Village Council, but it operates daily, independently from the Village Council and Toshao. This helps to ensure continuity in leadership when, for example, a new Toshao and Village Council come into power.

7. Tourism Development Action & Business Plan. Communities need a road map and practical tools to guide tourism development and manage tourism. This includes a business plan for their community tourism enterprise. Action Plans are successful when they are informed by participatory community visioning, goal setting and action planning process and reflect the comments, recommendations, and preferences of the Toshao, Village Council members, residents, and external tourism stakeholders. Importantly, these action plans should be prescriptive and clearly define the level of priority, timeline and responsible parties leading and supporting each line of action and the associated tasks.

8. Market-driven Product Development. The tourism development and planning approach within communities in Guyana has traditionally been ad hoc and supply-driven. The demand for authentic cultural and nature-based experiences and tourism that benefits people and places has been increasing globally. This defines Guyana's raw product offering. Product development must be linked to this market demand to maximise resource efficiencies and the return on investment.

9. Setting Expectations and Benefit Sharing. Community expectations should be managed and aligned, recognising that it takes at least a few years of hard work to develop and successfully implement a new community enterprise. Tourism frequently generates supplemental income but should not be a community's only means of income. To maximise supplemental income and become visitor ready, community members should specialise in different areas of hospitality and the requisite support services, including producing arts and crafts, providing supplies (e.g., beverages, fish, meats, fruits, and vegetables), food cooking and catering, tour offerings, home-stays, and transportation.

10. Partnerships & Market Linkages. Tourism communities and businesses must work together to create tourism circuits, differentiate their offerings from one another, and create marketing linkages with inbound and outbound tour operators and online travel agencies to reach their market markets. It is advantageous to identify private sector tour operators and other partners interested in selling the community tourism product that is under consideration. If domestic tour operators in Guyana are not interested, the potential viability of a proposed product is questionable.

11. Communication. Community tourism enterprises should be accessible by radio, cell phone, or the internet to receive bookings and guest info and accommodate last-minute changes. Historically, many communities have had limited to no means for communicating with the outside world. This is rapidly changing as the Office of the Prime Minister establishes internet connectivity in remote communities throughout Guyana.



Lessons learned

Many indigenous communities and villages have attempted to build and/or operate eco-lodges. Few have been successful. There are many reasons for the traditionally high failure rates. These include but are not limited to:

1. Unsuitable locations are leading to inaccessibility and sub-optimal siting of lodging.
2. Unsuitable design of lodges and other infrastructure (e.g., small rooms, short beds for taller visitors, lack of adequate bathroom facilities).
3. Design of products to suit one's liking or perception of what travellers want rather than what the visitor/target market wants.
4. Lack of cooperation/shared vision within the community or continuity of leadership once there are changes in leadership at a community level.
5. The expectation is that tourism will quickly generate money and attract visitors versus the reality that generating financial returns from tourism takes time.
6. The expectation is that if we build it, people will come.
7. Historical lack of adequate inter-agency support and collaboration.

Results, achievements and recognitions

The below are general results/achievements of the CLOT in Rewa.

- Rewa partnership with the Indifly Foundation and conservation biologist Dr. Lesley de Souza has tremendously benefited the community by studying and monitoring the arapaima population. Today, this combination of actions has helped restore the Arapaima population to more than 4,000 within the area.
- Through establishment of the CLOT Framework, the possibility of youths attaining a higher education has been achieved and some residents were even given the opportunity to study at the University of Guyana in various fields.
- During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Rewa Eco Lodge was one of the community established businesses that were able to sustain most of its 45 staff members. This is in spite of the fact that the borders were closed and there were many travel restrictions locally for approximately 5 months.

Additional Positive Impacts of the CLOT with the monitoring measures outlined under each.

Ripple Effect: design of a scalable initiative, which is beginning to be replicated in Indigenous communities throughout Guyana, that takes advantage of the interlinkages and cross-cutting impacts of the tourism sector to drive the implementation of the LCDS and the achievement of the SDGs.

- Quantification of the number of Indigenous communities involved in tourism and the number of communities operating community-owned enterprises

Social impact: provision of the receptive communities with direct access to the travel and tourism value chain, support capacity building, help to preserve cultural heritage, increase community pride, and reduce out-migration

- Quantification of the number of training and the number of community members trained in each individual training.



●Quantification of the number of traditional cultural heritage stories and performances integrated into the community tourism product offering.

●Quantification of the number of private sector partnerships established.

Economic impact: increase direct spending by domestic and international visitors, increased enterprise development and employment creation and an economic multiplier effect with an emphasis on Indigenous women entrepreneurs and youth within the beneficiary communities.

●Quantification of job creation by gender and age. Note: The majority of roles in Indigenous community tourism enterprises in Guyana are prescribed to women. The women are almost exclusively responsible for craft-making enterprises, food catering, and for the cleaning, cooking, and reception roles within eco-lodges. A majority of men, young and old alike, are responsible for tour guiding and the provision of transportation services. There is perceived to be an equal split between men and women who manage eco-lodges in Guyana. Men and women of all ages are involved in cultural performances and storytelling.

●Quantification of the visitor expenditures within the communities and disaggregate them by expenses for service offerings, suppliers, and for the shared community development funds.

●Quantification of the number of community members receiving direct economic benefits from the community enterprise.

Environmental impact: creation of alternative livelihood opportunities, which has created an incentive for communities to support the conservation of ecosystems, wildlife protection and natural resource management; and support of sustainable energy production and use.

●Quantification of the amount of protected tribal lands set aside in community conservation areas.

●Quantification of sustainable energy production.

It is important to

note that monitoring of the above metrics is continuous.

Recognition:

Guyana's approach to Community-led and Owned Tourism has begun to receive international recognition through several prominent awards:

●The World's #1 Best of Ecotourism at ITB Berlin, the world's leading travel and trade show (March 2019).

●Top 10 Sustainable Destinations at ITB Berlin, the world's leading travel and trade show (March 2019).

●1st Place for Guyana - Welcome back to Nature Video at the Golden City Gate Awards (March 2019).

●The #1 Best in Sustainable Tourism at the LATA Achievement Awards (June 2019).

●The #1 Best in Destination Stewardship at the CTO's Sustainable Tourism Awards Programme (August 2019).

●Silver Place in Best of Adventure from the International Travel & Tourism Awards (November 2019).

●1st Place for a video submitted in the Stay Safe category - "Welcome Back to Guyana" at the Golden City Gate Awards (March 2021).



Additional references

Rewa Images:

- <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1olwidOhOH4-AvwDTQ1tFwx4hSvv2yKnX?usp=sharing>

Articles

- *Community-led and owned Tourism: How Guyana's own brand of sustainable destination management is helping indigenous communities thrive*
<https://hub.wtm.com/blog/destinations/community-led-and-owned-tourism-how-guyanas-own-brand-of-sustainable-destination-management-is-helping-indigenous-communities-thrive/>
(April 22, 2021)
- *Eco-lodges set to reopen with completion of COVID-19 training*
<https://www.stabroeknews.com/2021/04/23/news/guyana/eco-lodges-set-to-reopen-with-completion-of-covid-19-training/>
- *Going for Green in Guyana - A 'tell us your story' feature on community-led, community-owned tourism and conservation*
https://www.books.roughguides.com/article/going-for-green-in-guyana/?fbclid=IwAR1JMfF7FYfGih1O8UbTjMSFc7_yv9l7yXfC4zmBvYpbHmuv8RcqLQ7_sls
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- *Adventure Activities in Guyana*
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(April 8, 2021 - Updated: Apr 13)
- *Indigenous peoples' ministry, tourism authority partner for community-based hinterland tourism initiative*
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(March/April, 2019)
- *'We want to keep our forest': why Guyana's wilderness needs visitors. A community-run wildlife tour shows how tourism can help preserve a remote rainforest and introduces visitors to a stunning array of fauna and jungle vistas.*
<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2019/oct/27/guyana-jungle-rainforest-community-run-wildlife-tour-adventure>
(Oct 27, 2019)

