

SUSTAINABLE TOP 100 DESTINATION SUCCESS STORY

Sani Isla – Ecuador

In 1965, three families lived in the area that is now known as the community of Sani Isla. One of the first inhabitants to settle in this sector was called Sani; he had the idea of founding a Commune in this area. As the years passed, more Kichwa families from other areas of the Ecuadorian Amazon continued to arrive. In those years each family had its own land, being its main source of work agriculture, with this activity they raised their families. This is how the community of Sani Isla began to grow, in an abundant time when all the families were fed by hunting, fishing and the food they sowed. After some years when they had settled more families in this place created a Community with legal recognition, belonging to an Organization where its residents could register.

The name Sani Isla is because before in the Napo River, small islands had formed and in one of them a plant called Sani Yura grew, of violet color, then the settlers of the time called the community Sani Isla. The Kichwa Sani Isla Commune is located on the banks of the Napo River and was established on August 5, 1988 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador. Sani Isla is the largest community in the Ecuadorian Amazon that has more than 600 inhabitants among children, youth and adults, this community is the only one that belongs to two provinces and two of the most biodiverse protected areas in the world, such as the Yasuní National Park and the Cuyabeno Fauna Reserve. The community has preserved the culture and tradition for many years, as it is the custom of the local Kichwa people who inhabit the banks of the Napo River. This Community has more than 45,000 hectares and has a great diversity of flora and fauna that tourists who visit it can appreciate. It is for this reason that local people are becoming increasingly aware of the care and conservation of natural resources. This community had many social problems due to lack of knowledge in leadership issues to better guide this organization that was starting, in these times the Community had no knowledge in tourism issues, much less in oil issues, for that reason they were convinced by the oil company in exchange for some things without much value for the members of the Community.

When the community was formed, its steering group was formed, where the idea of creating a Community Tourism Center (CTC) project was born. In the territory of the community there is a blackwater lagoon where black caimans live, it is a very quiet area of the community and with an overwhelming landscape. At the beginning of the year 1999, they began to build three cabins. Around this time the OXY Company conducted studies to detect the presence of oil in this area; fortunately, the results of the studies were negative for the presence of hydrocarbons. The Community was favored with this result and ecotourism activities began.

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During this time, it was very difficult to administer the project, since the community did not have the experience and with people trained to do so. The community had many problems at the beginning to strengthen their tourism business, so the oil companies took advantage of this situation to offer perks and divide their inhabitants. Currently the community continues to resist oil exploitation, only want to conserve natural resources and seek a livelihood in tourism. The community managed to strengthen its ecotourism project and currently the project is managed 100% by its people. Revenues remain in the community and serve to strengthen Sani Isla day by day, becoming the only ecotourism project in the region where the community owns and administers it.

The intrusion of the oil companies in the area continues to be one of the most accentuated problems that the community faces. These extractive industries affect the tourism sector, while at the same time generating internal problems in the community and with the neighboring communities. At present, different programs of sustainable development and conservation of natural resources are carried out within the community. Projects such as the women's group of Sani Warmi and Llickchari are supported by different organizations with whom the community has made alliances and which also help strengthen Sani Lodge's Community Tourism. This helps to increase the number of visitors and generates more jobs for the same inhabitants of the community. Sani Lodge as a Community project is 100% dedicated to supporting all Kichwa local people in health, education, economic support to seniors and a number to the board for their efforts during the period of their work in front of community.

The Sani Lodge Community Tourism Center is also focused on training Lodge personnel in the different areas to provide a better service to customers visiting this wonderful place, while maintaining the least impact on nature. For the improvement of the Lodge has been fundamental the support of the Community in matters of conservation of natural resources, such as not hunting animals, this has given a good result and nowadays you can see many species around the Lodge and the different trails that are used for tourist activities. Additionally, during the last three years we have been visited by scientific experts to carry out studies of the different species that host our forests. These studies are carried out in the company of the tour guides of the Lodge, who are also trained in the knowledge of our species and the importance they represent for ecosystems.

Sani Lodge has a history of 18 years working with the Community Tourism Center of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador. In the community we know that we still have a lot to learn, but we also know that we have managed to strengthen a good project and that we are ready to apply for international recognition.



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Additional Web References:

Sani Isla video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JO2Syt0-dY&feature=youtu.be>

- sanilodge.com

- Rainforestpartnership.org

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