

## How to Set Up a Sustainable Tourism Business in a Developing Country

Formed just about two years ago, Out in Colombia Travel is a unique, socially responsible LGBT inbound travel and tourism agency committed to making Colombia the top gay travel and sustainable tourism destination worldwide. We believe that travel can open hearts and minds and heal our planet, which is why we create life-changing and memorable tourism experiences for gay travelers that promote cross-cultural exchanges, improve quality-of-life, and preserve Colombia's awesome bio-diversity.

Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet. It is made up of rich and diverse cultures and a population made up of different backgrounds. Each of Colombia's five geographic regions has their own unique flavors, traditions, challenges, and needs. Yet, as a developing country, it is not without its problems. And as international tourism is on the rise, the country faces new challenges.

Tourism, when done correctly, can be a powerful tool for sustainable development, injecting much needed resources into communities while preserving local cultures and protecting the local environment. Some efforts are being made to promote sustainable tourism in Colombia, but the concept has not been broadly implemented in Colombia. As a result, we've already seen the damage that unchecked tourism has had. In recent years, the government has shut down travel by boat to certain remote beaches and islands because the volume has damaged the local marine ecosystem. We have also seen neighborhoods that were once celebrated as innovative models for sustainable community infrastructure turn into tourist zones, dislocating the very community members that the infrastructure projects were meant to serve.

Colombia is in a unique position to set up a sustainable tourism infrastructure before mass tourism can cause lasting damage. But to protect the pristine natural environment,

beautifully-rich cultures, and the local economy from the havoc that we have seen mass tourism wreck in places like Cuba and elsewhere in the world, sustainable tourism must become the norm.

That is why Out in Colombia Travel had made a commitment to build tourism packages that promote sustainable tourism, using a supplier network that shares that commitment. As our profile as a leader in the industry grows, our influence over our supplier network is increasing as well. Together, we will develop innovative tourism products and practices that:

- Minimize the environmental impact of tours through eco-friendly practices
- Inject income into local economies by hiring local tour guides, among other things
- Foster a respect for local cultures through authentic intercultural exchanges
- Effect long-term change through tours that educate tourists on sustainability

We have already created an initial list of suppliers who are part of our network. And we have already developed marketable tour packages that emulate the spirit of sustainability.

Through our alliances with entities like ProColombia (a government enterprise charged with promoting international investments & tourism), we will continue to grow that network and become even more sustainable.