Tourism Development as a Supplemental Livelihood Strategy:
A comparative analysis of community-based tourism organizations in
Panama

Sabrina Dabby and Emily Murdock
McGill University

*Project Supervised by*
Adrian Benedetti and Cristina Maduro

Presented to
Dr. Ana Spalding

April 25th, 2014
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTACT INFORMATION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITIONS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESUMEN EJECUTIVO</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MC GILL CODE OF ETHICS</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOST INSTITUTION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Justification</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Poverty and Livelihoods in Panama</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism in Panama</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caminando Panamá: A new form of tourism</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>METHODS</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail Map</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Organizations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESULTS</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART A: Organizations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grupo Ecoturístico Sendero Piedra Pintada (GESPP)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperativa Agroturística Las Mozas (CALM)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha (CTQA)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe (CTS)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART B: Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Viability of Community-Based Tourism Organizations as a Framework</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: Assessing Community-Based Tourism</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Livelihoods and the Future of El Valle: La Corona de El Valle Proposal</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORKS CITED</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDICES</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A - Interview Questions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: TCPS 2: CORE Ethics Certificates</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C - Map of the Corona de El Valle</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D - Information for Interviewees</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E - Community Interview Raw Data</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F - La Corona de El Valle Proposal for Caminando Panamá</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX G - Logistical Information</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTACT INFORMATION

Home Institution
McGill University
845 Sherbrooke Street West, H3A 2T5
Montréal, Québec, Canada
Website: [www.mcgill.ca](http://www.mcgill.ca)

Host Institution
Caminando Panamá
Website: [www.caminandopanama.org](http://www.caminandopanama.org)

Supervisors:
Adrian Benedetti and Cristina Maduro
Telephone #: 00 (507) 6453 3620
Email: caminandopanama@gmail.com

Authors
Emily Murdock (260402000)
B.A. Environment
McGill University
Email: emily.murdock@mail.mcgill.ca

Sabrina Dabby (260479100)
B.A. International Development
McGill University
Email: sabrina.dabby@mail.mcgill.ca

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

Grupo Ecoturistico Sendero Piedra Pintada (GESPP)
Cooperativa Agroturistica Las Mozas (CALM)
Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha (CTQA)
Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe (CSTF)
Community-Based Tourism Organization (CBTO)
Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)
Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF)
La Cooperativa La Esperanza de Los Campesinos (CEC)
Instituto Panameño Autónomo Cooperativo (IPACOOP)

DEFINITIONS

Community-Based Tourism Organizations (CBTO): The authors have chosen to define community-based tourism organizations as organizations created and managed by community members that address both tourism development and touristic sites. These organizations can include tourism committees, cooperatives etc.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism Development as a Supplemental Livelihood Strategy: A comparative analysis of community-based tourism organizations in Panama

Authors: Sabrina Dabby and Emily Murdock
Host Institution: Caminando Panama

Introduction
Though Panama’s natural wealth, attributed to its status as an Isthmus, is abundant, little has been done to capitalize on either adventure or eco-tourism. Following laws introduced in 1994 giving incentives to large-scale tourism developments, most tourism development has been by multi-national companies, such as hotel chains and cruise ship lines. More than limiting the scope of tourism opportunities in Panama, these laws have acted to limit small-scale and community-based tourism development that often has benefits for the rural poor, including supplementing income, increasing community autonomy and higher multiplier effects locally and nationally.

Objectives
The goal of our study was twofold. We began by creating a trail route around the ‘crown’, or El Valle de Antón, and a proposal on how to make this trail a viable tourism attraction for the town. The new trail passes through many small hamlets, villages, and communities, which could benefit in a variety of ways from increased touristic activities.

The second goal of our study was to produce a comparative analysis of community-based tourism organizations (CBTO) in Panama in order to understand the viability of these organizations in the context of tourism development and get to know what works and what does not. Since several CBTOs are present along the proposed trail, we hoped to gain a better understand of how they are organized and whether this could be a potential framework for unorganized communities along the trail: La Corona de El Valle.

Methods
Over four months from January to April 2014, we created a trail map using GPS devices and guides, conducted semi-structured interviews with CBTO members, and reviewed a number of academic articles.

Employing convenient sampling methods, we interviewed four CBTOs regarding their origins, organization, functions, and benefits. In addition we conducted a thematic analysis of the results in order to compare and contrast the CBTOs.

Additionally, we supplemented our time in the field with a critical literature review about tourism in Panama, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, and the benefits of community-based tourism.

Results
Using a thematic analysis, three themes were identified that act to determine the success, and therefore viability of CBTOs.

1. Site Characteristics play a large role in the success of a CBTO. High site specificity, meaning an organization is based on a sole attraction, limits room
for growth therefore limiting the potential for income supplementation. Alternatively, less site-specificity and room for service diversification increases growth potential.

2. **Motivations** to form and continue operating differ among CBTOs but all see themselves as more than merely a supplemental livelihood. This could suggest that success of a CBTO is based on more than mere economics.

3. **Institutional Support** is a key component in the success of CBTOs studied. Having third-party support, especially from private and non-governmental organizations, was an indicator of increased success.

**Conclusions**

The creation of CBTOs appears to be a viable route for many communities with tourism potential. Both social and financial benefits are a clear consequence of CBTO development that spread throughout the community. Examined within the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), it appears that membership in a CBTO helps to diversify livelihoods and offers varying degrees of supplemental income.

In El Valle de Antón where our proposed **Corona de El Valle** trail is situated, several communities could benefit from the creation of a CBTO in their community. However, lack of resources, both financial and human-based, is a huge threat to the success of such an endeavour. We recommend that Caminando Panamá work with communities that will be incorporated into the trail to help develop the capacity to capitalize on potential tourism development as studied CBTOs have done.
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

Desarrollo del turismo como una estrategia de vida suplementario: Un análisis comparativo de las organizaciones de turismo comunitario en Panamá

Autores: Sabrina Dabby y Emily Murdock
Institución: Caminando Panamá

Introducción

A causa de su estatus de un istmo, Panamá tiene un patrimonio natural inmenso. Desafortunadamente, poco se ha hecho para desarrollar el sector del ecoturismo o del turismo de la aventura. Algunas leyes de 1994 dan incentivos solamente a los desarrollos turísticos a gran escala, entonces la mayoría de ellos son para las empresa multinacionales, como las cadenas de hoteles y las líneas de cruceros. Más que la limitación del ámbito de las oportunidades de turismo en Panamá, estas leyes han limitado al desarrollo del turismo a la escala pequeña y a la escala de la comunidad que frecuentemente tienen más beneficios por los pobres rurales. Los beneficios incluyen la suplementación del ingreso, la autonomía comunal aumentando, y más efectos multiplicadores localmente y nacionalmente.

Objetivos

La meta de nuestra investigación era doble. Empezamos con la creación de un sendero alrededor de la corona de El Valle de Antón y una propuesta sobre la viabilidad y la promoción del sendero como una atracción turística. El nuevo sendero pasa por muchas comunidades pequeñas que podrían beneficiar, en muchas maneras diferentes, por una aumentación en actividades turísticas.

La meta segunda de nuestra investigación fue la producción de un análisis comparativo sobre las cooperativas y los comités de turismo de algunas comunidades (CBTOs) en Panamá. Quisimos entender la viabilidad de estas organizaciones en el contexto del desarrollo turístico: que funciona y que no funciona. Algunos CBTOs están a lo largo del sendero entonces esperamos obtener un conocimiento mejor de sus organización. También quisimos entender si el CBTO es un infraestructura que podría funcionar por otras comunidades a lo largo de El Valle.

Metodología

Durante cuatro meses de trabajo, entre enero y abril 2014, creábamos un mapa del sendero utilizando un aparato de GPS y las guías, hicimos las entrevistas medio estructurado y hicimos una crítica de la literatura académica.

Empleando los métodos de muestreo conveniente, entrevistamos cuatro CBTOs sobre su origen, su organización, sus usos y los beneficios. Además hicimos una análisis temático de los resultados para comparar y contrastar los CBTOs.

Aun más, complementamos nuestro tiempo en el campo con una crítica de la literatura sobre el turismo en Panamá, la estrategia de los sustentos sostenibles (SLA) y los beneficios del turismo que incluye las comunidades.
Resultados
Tres temas estaba identificado que determinar el suceso, por lo tanto su viabilidad, de los CBTOs.

1. **Características del sitio** juega un papel en el suceso de un CBTO. Una organización basado sobre una sola atracción, se limita su crecimiento y potencial por la suplementación del ingreso. Alternativamente, las organizaciones no basado sobre una sola atracción tienen la posibilidad por la diversificación de los servicios aumentan la potencial de crecimiento.

2. **Motivaciones** para formar y dirigir los CBTOs son diferentes, pero todos se ven más que simplemente una manera de ganar un ingreso suplementario. Esto sugeriría que el suceso de un CBTO es basado en más que economía.

3. **Apoyo institucional** una parte clave del suceso de los CBTOs fíngido. El apoyo de los terceros, especialmente de las organizaciones privadas y las organizaciones no-gubernamental, es una indicadora del suceso aumentado.

Conclusiones
La creación de los CBTOs parece una ruta viable para muchas comunidades con un potencial del turismo. Los beneficios a través de la comunidad, ambos social y financiero, son una consecuencia clara del desarrollo de los CBTOs. Examinado dentro de la infraestructura de los ingresos sostenibles (SLF), parece que una afiliación con un CBTO ayuda en la diversificación y suplementación de los ingresos. En El Valle de Antón, donde nuestra propuesta sobre el sendero La Corona de El Valle está situado, algunas comunidades podrían beneficiarse con la creación de un CBTO en sus comunidad. Desafortunadamente, la falta de recursos, ambas financiera y humana, es una amenaza al suceso del esfuerzo. Recomendamos a Caminando Panamá: trabajar con las comunidades a lo d el sendero para ayudar en el desarrollo de sus capacidades de capitalizar sobre la potencial turística como los CTBOs incluyendo.
MC G I L L C O D E O F E T H I C S

A portion of this project’s results relied on information gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with members of three tourism cooperatives. Examples of the surveys are provided in the Appendix A. All surveys were performed with free prior informed consent, and were conducted according to the McGill Code of Ethics. Additionally, both authors completed the Canadian Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE), certificates can be found in Appendix B.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

We received a lot of help throughout the duration of this project and many thanks are due. First, a big thank you to Adrian Benedetti and Cristina Maduro for supervising all of our work and providing us with logistical support and guidance throughout our internship. We would also like to thank Edgardo Griffith, Heidi Ross, the Nispero Zoo and the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Centre for offering us lodging during our stays in El Valle de Antón. In addition, a big thank you for providing us with contacts to local guides. We are extremely grateful for the guidance provided to us by Carlos ‘Carlitos’ Celis who, as a local guide with excellent knowledge of the surrounding areas and hiking trails, provided us with invaluable information and good company. Additionally, we would like to thank Caminando Panama’s board member Irving Bennett for his invaluable guidance on trails around El Valle, as well as his .gpx files. Without them we may not have made it to today.
We are grateful for the help given to us by Christian Strassnig, who without hesitation helped us reach more one of our remote sites. Furthermore, Victor Frankel’s guidance and insight was indispensable for the culmination of this project, as was the support of our supervisor from STRI, Dr. Ana Spalding. We would like to thank Dr. Catherine Potvin and Dr. Hector Barrios for selecting us for this program and McGill University and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute for providing us with this wonderful opportunity. Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank the indispensable members of the Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha, Grupo Ecoturístico Sendero Piedra Pintada, Cooperativa Agroturística Las Mozas and Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe who gave their time to make this project what it is!

**HOST INSTITUTION**

This project was conducted in conjunction with Caminando Panamá, a recently formed NGO by power couple Adrian Benedetti and Cristina Maduro. The NGO was born from a love of outdoor recreation and a desire to encourage Panamanians to rediscover their inherent *Patrimonio Natural y Cultural*. Their joint vision of improving the welfare of rural communities and promoting Panama as a destination for sustainable adventure ecotourism offers a platform for Panama’s future sustainable development plans.

In conjunction with volunteers, Caminando Panama maps trails throughout the country. In this way, both Panamanians and foreign tourists can access .gpx files of the trails for their GPS devices, as well as descriptions of trails, costs associated with the trails, and contact information of trusted local guides from Caminando Panama’s website.
As Panama is still predominately associated with shopping and business tourism (Mapes, 2009), Caminando Panama is single handedly making Panama’s natural heritage more accessible to those interested in diversifying their travel plans.

In order to ensure that increased ecotourism is beneficial to the rural communities that it will affect, Caminando Panama works extensively with communities and tourism cooperatives. Capacity building and community involvement are integral to the process of mapping and cleaning trails in order that increased tourism can act as a supplemental livelihood to those living along more remote trails, and not an increased nuisance.

Caminando Panama is a “personal project” and therefore runs purely on volunteer support, limited government grants, and media coverage. Unfortunately, media coverage is generally limited to high profile trails such as the Camino Real and the Camino de Cruces, trails which are extremely important to Panama’s history as a Spanish colony and center of world trade. Currently, much of the Central and Western parts of Panama have been mapped and made available online. Caminando Panama looks forward to exploring Eastern Panama and the Darien, a location that is likely to entice many ‘adventure tourists’ and has a huge potential to offer new livelihood strategies to rural communities in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Project Justification

One destination in which Caminando Panama hopes to make an impact is El Valle de Antón, a popular destination for Panamanian nationals and foreigners alike, due to cooler temperatures, tranquility, and attractions. The town sits within the crater of an
extinct volcano flanked on all four sides by hiking trails along ridges and up mountains. Though a richness of hiking trails exists, El Valle de Antón’s website\(^1\) contains little information regarding the trails, mentioning only two of many, and has no map of the trails in order to help guide potential hikers.

Our project was divided into two distinct parts (1) a proposal focused on the development of a *Corona de El Valle* trail loop and the promotion of El Valle de Antón as a destination for adventure tourism and (2) a research report doing a comparative study of community-based tourism organizations in Panamá in order to contribute to the literature base as little exists to date.

The focus of our proposal is on the development of a cohesive hiking trail around El Valle, to be posted on Caminando Panamá’s website. In addition to the physical .gpx file of the completed trail, our proposal focuses on the benefits of increased adventure tourism in the area, the limitations faced by community members, and next steps for the promotion of El Valle de Antón as an adventure tourism destination. Our hope is that by improving knowledge regarding the wealth of trails surrounding El Valle de Antón, as well as the accessibility and maintenance of the trails, the diversity of nature-based tourism in the area will increase. Currently, it centers on bird watching tours and small-scale zip-lining provided by private companies. In line with the values of Caminando Panamá, our hope is that promotion of *La Corona de El Valle* will increase tourism for communities located along the trail, instead of solely within El Valle’s town limits.

We decided to investigate CBTOs further due to the amount we were encountering in the field versus the lack of literature we were finding. As two tourism cooperatives are

---

currently present in El Valle de Antón, it is important to understand whether this model is viable, and whether it could be viable in other communities that may begin to experience higher rates of visitors with projects such as this. As such, we performed a comparative study of two tourism cooperatives in El Valle de Antón, Coclé: one tourism committee in the community of Quebrada Ancha, Colón, and an ecotourism group in Achiote, Colón in order to answer the following research question: Are CBTOs a viable supplemental livelihood strategy for communities in El Valle de Antón, Panamá?

**Objectives**

The main objective of this research project is to understand how community-based tourism can act as a supplemental income. Due to the existence of two tourism cooperatives in El Valle de Antón, we thought it was important to compare these tourism groups with others in Panamá. More specifically, this project aims to bring more insight on CBTOs to the greater literature base on supplemental livelihood strategies, as little currently exists. This gap in the literature is stark as personal observations throughout Panamá make it clear that CBTOs are a growing phenomenon in the country. Understanding how to make tourism a viable supplemental livelihood strategy for low-income individuals and communities in El Valle de Antón is important in the context of Caminando Panamá’s work and the promotion of *La Corona de El Valle* trail. In addition, it may also provide insights for other communities with the potential to capitalize on tourism markets.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Poverty and Livelihoods in Panama

Despite Panama’s quick development, poverty remains a difficult issue. Panama received a score of 56.1 on the Gini Index in 2011 (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012), and country-wide income inequality remains one of worst in the world (Falaris, 2008). Panama is a country that has seen rapid growth, but growth that predominately serves the elites (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012). The government focuses its efforts and funds into their biggest asset – the Canal Zone, and as such, the needs of those in rural areas fall by the wayside (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012). Education creates an unequal divide within the country; the difference is especially pertinent for those in the countryside with less access to a proper education (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012). Watts and Dannels argue that “improvements in education are essential for reducing poverty, for modernizing Panama, and for allowing Panamanians opportunities”, money should be redirected away from the canal and towards the educational sector (2012).

Panama’s poor infrastructure drives the cycle of inequality. The country uniquely has one main center, Panama City and people in the surrounding provinces lack access to the same amenities as the population in the city, notably roads (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012). According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) eighty percent of the roads throughout Panama are poor quality (Watts and Dannels Ruff, 2012). The World Bank stated that more than one third of Panamanians live in poverty and around 14.4% in extreme poverty (2011). That reality is exacerbated for the people in the countryside as they are unable to easily access the city and the markets in the core. The national economy is the fastest growing in Latin America (World Bank, 2011), yet the provinces
still have yet to be prioritized. Watts and Dannels Ruff argue that large income inequality is a threat to democracy, which could lead to a detrimental reality for the country (2012).

Ellis argues that “a livelihood is more than just income […] , it includes cash and in kind, as well as the social institutions” (1998). Our definition of an alternative livelihood is people who have a regular job but supplement their income with a side job. As such, “diversification may occur both as a deliberate household strategy or as an involuntary response to crisis”, as a way to avoid running a household deficit (Ellis, 1998). In the case of this paper, the focus is on how cooperatives, a form of alternative livelihoods, can help enhance family incomes. As indicated, poverty remains a paralyzing reality for a large portion of Panama’s population. As such, it is no surprise that supplemental livelihoods are a way for people to escape being marginalized by their income status.

Panama’s variable seasons also increase job instability. The agricultural system works on a schedule, and that schedule decreases exponentially along with job constancy in the dry season. However, an important distinction to make is that while the agricultural system suffers, the tourism industry flourishes.

Tourism in Panama

Tourism is a rapidly growing sector of Panama’s economy (Klytchnikova et al., 2013), and is therefore continually gaining importance for government economic planning. In 2012, tourism alone contributed almost 5.2% of Panama’s GDP, 12.4% of Panama’s employment, and 6.2% of foreign investment (WTTC, 2013). As Panama continues to be a favourite destination for young people, business travellers, and Western retirees alike, the tourism industry is set to continue growing into the future. Due to the potential growth and economic benefits of tourism, the Panamanian Tourism Authority
(ATP) has set ambitious targets for 2007-2020 in order to promote its development (Klytchnikova et al., 2013).

As the tourism sector grows in Panama, it is pertinent that the benefits of tourism are spread both vertically and horizontally. Though tourism can result in “significant direct benefits at the local level by generating employment and improving wages [...] as well as stimulate growth in tourism-related activities [ex. handicrafts, services etc.]”, “leakages” of these benefits to other regions, sectors, and countries often occur (Klytchnikova et al., 2013). In many host countries, it is not uncommon for 80-90% of tourist revenues to disappear through these leakages (Mapes, 2009).

With the hope of increasing foreign investment in Panama, in 1994 the government passed Law No. 8 “the Tourism Incentive Law” that “structures a series of development incentives for tourism activities” (Mapes, 2009). The incentives include such measures as exonerations from land tax and import duties for 20 years, but these incentives only “kick in” at investments of US $100,000 (Mapes, 2009). While this law has acted to improve the state of the tourism industry, it has resulted in significant foreign investment instead of local development (Mapes, 2009). Though this law inadvertently acts to “push out” small-scale development, households in Panama still retain about “56% of the total gains in incomes from tourism expenditure” through multiplier effects, as well as strong forward and backward linkages (Klytchnikova et al., 2013).

In order to retain both monetary and environmental wealth, community participation is integral to the success of sustainable tourism (Campbell, 1999). As conservation promotion becomes more prominent, a push towards ecotourism development is being seen across the globe. Ecotourism acts doubly as a forum to pursue
social justice through a balance of “resource preservation and development”, which will likely directly involve communities (Tsaur et al., 2005). If community members are able to benefit directly from the maintenance of sustainable tourism activities and a well-maintained environment, results are likely to be much more positive since destination popularity commonly relies on the quality of the environment.

Often, ‘low-income’ countries are quick to adopt ecotourism as it offers an opportunity to capitalize on their resources (Cater, 1993), but as of yet, Panama has been slow to market their natural assets actively to the foreign and domestic public. Like many other travel destinations known for ecotourism, Panamá has a distinct advantage in terms of its natural value; waterfalls, mountains and wildlife are some of the many attractions communities can transform into additional or alternative livelihoods (Cater, 1993).

Tourism cooperatives and committees are a way for communities to take advantage of the growing tourism market. As such, these endeavors should be aided and studied further, since they are abundant throughout Panama but little literature relates to them.² These community organizations may collect entrance fees to natural or heritage sites of interest to both locals and tourists. This kind of framework is community-based and allows for a large majority of expenditures by tourists to remain in Panama, and more importantly among low-income individuals.

Caminando Panamá: A new form of tourism

Caminando Panama’s mission is to “promote the growth of an outdoor community that appreciates Panama’s natural and cultural heritage by connecting urban and rural needs to the benefits derived from proper use and care of trails.” By promoting and

²The authors have interacted with many CBTOs in the provinces of Colón, Bocas del Toro, and Coclé during their time in Panamá.
improving the accessibility of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, Caminando Panama is actively working to change the future face of Panamanian tourism. By expanding the accessibility of Panama’s “natural” heritage, the NGO is also promoting the growth of an outdoor recreation sector in Panama’s economy, which could have significant economic benefits at both a corporate and individual level.

In addition, Caminando Panama’s commitment to growth at the community level is integral to the future sustainable development of Panama’s tourism sector, which has thus far been geared towards large scale development project that often neglect the lived realities of local peoples. Cooperatives and landowners along trails work intimately with Caminando Panama, they are consulted for input and participate in the entire process of trail clean up and management. By promoting this type of tourism development everyone wins: community members benefit from capacity training, organization, and livelihood diversification while tourists benefit from clean and safe trails, lodging, and food.

METHODS

Trail Map

In order to map the trail “loop”, a Garmin GPS was used to record trails in .gpx format. These .gpx files were recorded over seven days of hiking. Using the program MyTracks, the files were edited and combined to create one cohesive and complete .gpx file that will be made available for download to the general public on the Caminando Panamá website. A map was also created using Google Earth and the trail .gpx file which will also be used on the organization’s website. This map can be seen in Appendix C.
Sample Organizations

Interviews were conducted with members of four different CBTOs: Grupo Ecoturistico Sendero Piedra Pintada, Cooperativa Agroturistica Las Mozas, Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha, and Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe. Two of the groups are located in El Valle de Antón, Coclé while the Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha is located in Lago Alajuela, Colón province and the Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe is located in the town of Santa Fe, Veraguas. The site locations can be seen in Figure 1.

Interviews

Due to the group dynamic of CBTOs, semi-structured group interviews were conducted with members present at the time of the interview. All members were invited to participate and all answers were recorded. Sites not located in El Valle de Antón were selected based on convenience sampling and where we had contacts. Each organization was asked standardized questions that can be see in Appendix B.

Figure 1. Location of CBTOs marked by stars.
Each individual involved in the interview process was given a physical description of the project (see Appendix D) and given verbal explanations of the authors’ motivations. If the interviewee in question could not read, the description was read to them. All questions regarding the project were discussed and responded to before beginning the interviews and consent was given verbally. All translated data can be found in Appendix E.

Limitations

Several limitations presented themselves during this investigation. Probably the biggest of these limitations, was our ineptitude in Spanish, which gracias a Dios, lessened over time. Due to this limitation, even though we were two conducting the interviews, it is sure that we missed certain subtleties within the answers. Thankfully, everyone interviewed was patient with us during the sometimes long and sometimes confusing interviews.

Building upon this limitation, a second serious limitation was our lack of voice recorders, which was our fault entirely. Having voice recorders would have allowed us to go back and re-listen to interviews to ‘get everything’. This was a case of poor planning.

Another limitation to the study is the convenience sampling method we used. Other than the two cooperatives that we were interested in in El Valle, we chose based on people we knew or places we went in the program. This may have resulted in a poor and non-representative sample within the four organizations. In addition, our study was only able to encompass qualitative data, which can often emphasize sensational findings more.
RESULTS

Our results are divided into two sections. The first provides a descriptive account of each CBTO. The second provides a thematic analysis of these results. All information presented was collected by the authors during interviews conducted between February 1 and April 17, 2014.

PART A: Organizations

Grupo Ecoturístico Sendero Piedra Pintada (GESPP)

Location

GESPP is located at the trailhead of the Sendero Piedra Pintada and La India Dormida at the western edge of the town of El Valle de Antón, Coclé. Due to high temperatures in most of the country, El Valle de Antón is an extremely popular location for Panamanians on weekends and during the summertime (the dry season), as well as for foreign tourists looking to enjoy Panama’s natural splendor in a cooler climate.

The Sendero Piedra Pintada is most famous for a large rock face covered in petroglyphs along the trail, though it also boasts beautiful water features and access to La India Dormida. In a book detailing the history of El Valle, these petroglyphs are described the oldest “enigmatic” traces of the first inhabitants of the valley (Noto, 1985). While no one knows the true story regarding these carvings, legend has it that the indigenous peoples of the valley would camp there during sacred rituals, as the large stone was hiding treasure that they guarded vigilantly (Noto, 1985). Today, La Piedra Pintada is one of the most advertised and well-known tourist sites in El Valle.

Origin
GESPP is a cooperative that started in 2007 and is now has a membership of 33 (mostly women), all from the small community of Piedra Pintada within El Valle that is home to lower-income individuals. People living in this area are descendants of people who migrated from the surrounding hills when El Valle first became a popular destination for wealthy Panamanians to fill emerging service jobs (Noto, 1985). This legacy has continued with many of the residents working in low paid service jobs or construction. The land is municipal, but GESPP was given the right to authority over the trail by the national government through the Instituto Panameño Autónomo Cooperativo (IPACOOP) in order to develop and improve the tourism sector of the community.

IPACOOP’s mission is “Aplicar métodos modernos de educación, asistencia técnica, supervisión y divulgación con el fin de impulsar las cooperativas como alternativa socio económica, democrática, solidaria y auto sostenible”. The government body works extensively with communities in order to promote the formation of cooperatives in the hopes to encourage people to work together and organize themselves in order to achieve benefits and common goals.

Organisation

GESPP charges entry to the trail for reasonable and affordable prices (between 1 and 2.25 USD depending on age and nationality). Profits earned from ‘ticketing’ are then divided as follows: an hourly wage is paid for time spent doing work pertaining to the cooperative and a percentage is allotted for maintenance and improvement of facilities and trail. In addition, members pay monthly dues to maintain membership in the cooperative.
Members were adamant that the cooperative is a democratic institution with decisions being made collectively. Meetings are held once a month to discuss how things are going, problems that need to be fixed etc. They see the cooperative as a community endeavor and therefore limit membership to people that live in Piedra Pintada. Should someone be interested in joining, they are invited to a meeting and explained the processes involved as well as the values of the cooperative. Joining is then up to the individual concerned. Little collaboration or knowledge sharing with other tourism cooperatives had occurred to date.

Functions

GESPP functions predominantly as a ticketing booth, collecting entrance fees at the foot of La Piedra Pintada. In addition, they maintain toilets for visitors and have permanent stands where artisans and food vendors can set up to sell wares during busier times (the dry season and weekends). Members also mentioned that they are in the process of diversifying their activities as they have interest in becoming more of a community group, rather than solely a tourism cooperative. Currently their other activities consist predominantly of small-scale agriculture.

Benefits

Benefits of the GESPP are both direct and indirect with significant multiplier effects due to the population density of El Valle de Antón. Though the cooperative cannot yet sustain individuals financially, it provides some form of income to housewives who might otherwise have little economic power in their household. It also acts to bring the community together by providing a community space and by encouraging the community to work hard for mutual benefit. Members of GESPP hope that by working
together the cooperative can expand to a level that steady incomes could be provided to all members, especially since the tourism industry is seasonal.

In addition, the market stalls built at the foot of the trail by the cooperative provide infrastructure to artisans (who are not cooperative members) looking to sell their crafts to tourists. As El Valle is not a rural area, the multiplier effects of the money earned at the cooperative are huge because it will likely be spent in the community at local businesses, fruit stands etc.

Cooperativa Agroturística Las Mozas (CALM)

Location

CALM is located at the entrance to the Las Mozas waterfalls at the southwest edge of El Valle de Antón. This is where the prehistoric lake that filled the crater after collapse first breached, resulting in emptying the body of water into a valley and the creation of the beautiful cascades (Lonely Planet, 2013). Much like La Piedra Pintada, a local legend exists to explain the name of Las Mozas, or The Maidens. The legend has it that three sisters were deeply in love with a famous warrior Caobo from Penonomé (Aguilera P., 2013). At celebrations they would see him, but no matter what they did, he simply paid no attention as he only had eyes for his enamorada Ruti (Aguilera P., 2013). Heartbroken, the three sisters jumped into the cascades where they could live without their earthly sufferings (Aguilera P., 2013). Now these waterfalls are some of the most popular and accessible of waterfalls in El Valle de Antón.

Origin

CALM started in October 2012 with 12 members from the sector surrounding the site, all who remain active today. Similarly to GESPP, the cooperative is situated on
municipal land that was granted to them by the *corregimiento* but unlike GESPP they have no affiliation with IPACOOP. CALM members mentioned that they started their cooperative with the realization that if they did not take advantage of this opportunity for tourism and supplemental income, another group would claim the site and the benefits. It is not simply a matter of tourism but as a way to protect their autonomy in the area.

*Organization*

Profits made from the cooperative are divided by an hourly wage with a percentage devoted to maintenance such as facilities (tables and benches in a rest area), trail maintenance, and bridge building. The cooperative meets every Tuesday to discuss upcoming events (such as school groups visiting) and perform ritual maintenance and clean up of the area. If someone from the community is interested in joining CALM it is simple, with all decisions being made in a democratic manner, they can join if the group members agree.

Like GESPP, the majority of CALM’s work occurs at a ticketing booth. While members are present to collect fees all year round, if the rain is too heavy, they don’t go due to the lack of business. Prices are extremely reasonable, ranging from 0.50-1 USD depending on age, which grants access to a relaxing seating area by the river as well as access to the three cascades.

*Functions*

GESPP functions predominantly as a ticketing booth at Las Mozas. In addition, they maintain toilets for visitors as well as have food prepared to sell on weekends when demand is highest. In addition, the cooperative has prepared ‘programs’ for school groups.
**Benefits**

Like the other tourism organizations, members of CALM cannot live off the income they bring in, though they do make money. Almost everyone in the cooperative has another job, though several housewives maintain this as their only source of income. More so than GESPP, likely due to the fact that it is located farther out of town, the CALM ticket booth clearly acts as a community hub where children relax with their siblings, cousins, and friends afterschool while their mothers and fathers work or hang out. Indirectly, CALM has helped to maintain community cohesion and interaction in an area where families are living more dispersed than other parts of El Valle. In addition, this gives members increased access to the cash economy which has multiplier effects throughout El Valle.

**Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha (CTQA)**

**Location**

Quebrada Ancha is a remote community on Lake Alajuela, Colón Province that can only be reached by boat. Running through the community is a portion of the Camino Real, known as the “colonial-era predecessor of the Panama Canal” (Strassnig, 2010). The road was of extraordinary importance during the colonial era as it was used to transport gold from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic in order to minimize land crossing before the trans-Atlantic voyage to the Spanish Crown (Strassnig, 2010). Quebrada Ancha’s location on the Camino Real has been integral to tourism development in the community.
**Origin**

CTQA began in 2008 in collaboration with Christian Strassnig’s archaeological research project on the Camino Real aimed at both preserving and rediscovering the cultural integrity and historical importance of the road (Strassnig, 2010). Before this moment, community members, namely subsistence farmers, small-scale coffee producers, and fishermen, had never thought of tourism as a potential supplemental livelihood strategy.

In 2011 the first tourists came with Mr. Strassnig, who works as a tour guide, and the number of visitors has been steadily increasing each year due to increasing publicity. Currently three guides operate tours that pass through Quebrada Ancha. In 2013, the committee welcomed 65 tourists to the community and these numbers are likely to continue increasing; the day after our visit the publication *La Prensa* was coming to conduct interviews with the community. Mr. Strassnig believes the Camino Real to be Panama’s equivalent to the Inca Trail and believes that in time the Camino Real may also need a permit system in order to control tourism pressures.

**Organization**

CTQA started with 26 community members but is now reduced to 22 (men, women, and children). People are allowed to join once they exhibit hard work, an understanding of the rules, and responsible actions; people can leave at their own discretion. No one in CTQA has set jobs within the committee, and positions, such as chef, clean-up, mason etc., rotate based on who is available to work. Profits earned by CTQA are divided by hours worked and work hours are determined during meetings (up to 4 in a week due to the wide range of activities happening in the community).
CTQA is not a cooperative, and seems indifferent to the idea of becoming one. The group receives no funding from governmental organizations or NGOs but does work in collaboration with several organizations, namely the Fondación Chagres. CTQA has worked with neighboring Emberá communities who have capitalized on the tourism industry by offering ‘authentic indigenous village’ tours to cruise ship companies. This communication has allowed for collaboration including resource and knowledge sharing between the groups. In addition, CTQA has been used as an example for other communities further along the Camino Real that are interested in attempting to development tourism organizations as well.

Functions

CTQA’s main function is to organize and regulate tourism through the community. Due to its presence, the Camino Real forms the basis for tourism in Quebrada Ancha though the committee has put together two ‘packages’ for tourists. The first involves morning ‘historical’ hikes around the community, followed by lunch, and several cultural presentations including a skit about the importance of the environment and folkloric dances. The other is the ruta de miel, a form of agrotourism, which tours their Africanized Bee Apiary, a project implemented in collaboration with the Fondación Chagres. In addition, CTQA sells artisanal crafts, such as cocobolo carvings, made by community members and some members occasionally work as porters for longer hiking trips.

In addition to offering these ‘packages’, the community has really understood how to cater to tourists. When tourists come through the community, beautiful flower garlands are strung up on all public buildings. The new kitchen is extremely clean and made from
beautiful materials. All food is served on nice dishes, which appears to be more upscale, but appeals to more environmentally conscious travellers who are likely used to eating off Styrofoam in similar situations. The welcoming of tourists has been well orchestrated in Quebrada Ancha.

**Benefits**

The benefits of organized tourism in the community are both direct and indirect, with strong multiplier effects. Due to the influx of tourists in the past three years, the community has taken on serious infrastructure projects that are beneficial to everyone, namely a new communal kitchen and a *ranchito* that is currently being built with materials donated by the Fondación Chagres. The *ranchito*'s main purpose will be to provide a space for spectacles to take place (they currently occur in the church) as well as supply an area for visitors to stay overnight. These infrastructure projects have provided new communal spaces for everyone, as well as a modern, culturally appropriate kitchen that provides meals to schoolchildren, not just tourists.

In addition to providing supplemental income to those who are directly involved with the committee, the committee purchases raw materials, food, and crafts locally acting to support other members of the community. This gives individuals and families better access to the cash economy in order to buy things like school uniforms and fuel (there is no electricity in the community). Finally, CTQA has created new partnerships between Quebrada Ancha and surrounding communities, as well as with different organizations that develop projects, and therefore opportunity, in the community, such as with the community apiary.
Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe (CTSF)

Location

Santa Fe is a small community of approximately 3000 people located about an hour North of Santiago in the mountains of Veraguas. Like other mountain towns in Panama, the climate is much cooler, therefore making it extremely attractive to tourists. The area is full of pristine rivers and beautiful waterfalls. Currently the town has neither an ATM nor a gas station which helps to regulate the influx of tourists, an increasing threat that brings increasing land prices and deforestation in the area. Santa Fe is unique within Panama, seemingly a utopia of cooperatives, unity, and solidarity as a community. The legacy of Hector Gallega, a man that worked towards equality and labour rights for all Santa in the 1960s, is strong within the community which has allowed for a different type of development than in other parts of Panama. 45 years ago La Cooperative de la Esperanza de los Campesinos was created allowing the community to take control of their own development by working side by side in solidarity instead of against one another in competition. This sentiment, of helping one another has resulted in a completely different setting for a tourism cooperative to begin.

Origin

CTSF became a legal cooperative in 2007 through IPACOOP. It was noted by the community that Santa Fe was becoming more and more popular among tourists but the community was not organized enough to receive tourists. Perhaps more importantly, members of the community were aware that most tourism developments, especially hotels and hostels are owned by foreigners with the benefits from tourism not reaching the community and campesinos in the area. The creation of CTSF was a response to this
phenomenon: taking back control of the budding tourism industry in a culturally appropriate manner of mutual cooperation and working together.

Organization

Currently the membership of the CTSF sits at about 56 men and women. By law the cooperative must meet once a month and the five ‘board members’ must be present.

All prices (of tours, per night lodging etc.) are decided upon by the cooperative together and income is dictated by the services and abundance one offers. Therefore, this can act as a full-time income or simply a supplementary income depending on the interest of individuals in the family to provide these services.

The cooperative, like most others, can be joined by anyone who shows interest in becoming involved. An inscription fee of 5 USD is paid once and annually members contribute 20 USD to the cooperative for administration costs etc. While this seems high, one night of lodging is typically 10 USD per person and so the ‘investment’ can be paid off quite quickly.

Currently the CTSF’s methods of communication with tourists are lacking. Last year the CTSF was lucky enough to receive support from the UN to build the cooperatives tourism office in the town square which can better organize guests, lodging, tours etc. but they still have no dedicated telephone for the cooperative and little connection to the internet making advanced planning difficult for potential tourists. In addition, the tourism office is currently running on volunteer support because they do not have enough capital to pay someone to work as a coordinator full time.
Functions

CTSF works, in essence, as a travel agency. Currently their main function is to provide affordable lodging solutions in the homes of cooperative members for tourists interested in agrotourism or simply a more “authentic” Santa Feño experience. In addition, CTSF can offer services to tourists, such as guides, tours, and transportation. In the coming year, the CTSF hopes to put together several tourism packages in order to better compete with other private, foreign owned enterprises within and outside of Santa Fe.

Benefits

The major benefit of the CTSF is the communal control of tourism development in Santa Fe. A major fear within the community is that Santa Fe will become the ‘next Boquete’ where, due to a large influx American retirees and tourists, the cost of living has become too high for many local people to afford. The CTSF allows for the benefits, especially economic, to be spread out throughout the community.

For example, our recent hosts, Zobaida and Yayo, mentioned that having tourists stay in her home allowed her to diversify and augment her income. Having this extra form of income has allowed them to begin a renovation on their home, notably a toilet, which will increase the range of tourists they can welcome to their organic farm.

In addition to direct effects, tourism increases the amount being spent within Santa Fe, especially at the other cooperative, which indirectly benefits the 1200 families that are part of it. Zobaida mentioned many times informally while we were with her that a huge motivation for her is the intercambio cultural that comes with having foreigners stay with her, a benefit to both host and guest.
PART B: Thematic Analysis  
After a thorough thematic analysis of the results, three themes were identified that acted to influence the success or lack thereof the CBTOs interviewed. These themes are Site Characteristics, Motivations, and Institutional Support.  

Site Characteristics  
Site characteristics were understood to be a determining factor in the success of CBTOs. The cooperatives in El Valle (GESPP and CALM) and the CTQA were formed around a site-specific tourist attraction, a hiking trail, waterfalls, and the Camino Real respectively. Alternatively, the CTSF acts as more of a service to make all of Santa Fe and the surrounding area available to tourists which doesn’t act to impose limits to their growth.  

Yet, each of the organizations was focused on creating development for themselves. They built their foundations and claimed their territory in order to push other possible development projects away. In El Valle, the surrounding communities manage the attractions, Quebrada Ancha is working within their own community and claiming their section of the Camino Real, while the CTSF formed out of a desire to ensure that the benefits of increased tourism reached community members, not just foreign enterprises (personal communication, April 16, 2014).  

CTQA became a tourism committee after archaeological exposition led by Christian Strassnig in 2011. Independent of Strassnig, however, the community is incredibly cohesive and organized. Within a mere three years they have been able to build a kitchen, community area and sanitary facilities. They have trained guides who understand the importance of the Camino Real, and a clear breakdown of tasks which they assign prior to tourist visits in their committee meetings.
While the need to be organized applies to each group, Quebrada Ancha and Santa Fe need the community support to function to their greatest degree. The tourists walking the Camino Real, stay in the community, partake in a cultural exchange and eat local cuisine, all of which take place in the town core. In Santa Fe, tourists stay at the houses of the members, and partake in similar activities. This type of exchange is deeply rooted in community interaction, as such it stands unique to El Valle as the cooperatives there merely receive money from the tourists upon arrival but contact ends there. Las Mozas and La Pierda Pintada are very much dependent on the popularity of El Valle as they are site based. They can be seen as limiting themselves to the one thing that they have; a natural resource. CTQA has diversified by offering food, artisanal goods, and sleeping areas beyond the Camino Real. By diversifying, the potential for growth is much larger. GESPP and CALM could take note of the successes of the other two CBTOs; community assets should be strengthened and diversified.

Motivations

Motivations for why the CBTO formed in each community is different, and rarely seem to be based in a desire to ‘make money’, though this is clearly a benefit. Their economic gains are generally not enough to sustain their needs, but enough to offer them a financial supplement. In some cases, as in CALM where the site-specificity of their CBTO is highest, income from the cooperative was little, but members felt it was necessary to claim the site as their territory. While a motivation of the CALM, and GESPP for that matter, is to earn money, more important is to claim the space and attraction within the community. In a similar vein, CTSF noticed that the benefits of increased tourism were rarely reaching members of the community. The creation of
CTSF was an action taken by the community to take control of tourism development in the community. The development of CBTOs allows the community to be at the forefront of change.

Alternatively, members of CTQA are able to conceive the potential for tourism to grow as a source of income in their community. Several members noted their motivation to begin the committee was its potential for growth and associated development in the community.

The cooperatives discussed are dependent on their area and tourist attraction in order to seen any gains. While the work to maintain the area and create a profit may be hard and time consuming, it seemed that the members of the cooperative or committee had a sense of commitment to the site regardless of money. This could be due to the numerous social benefits that come with a well-organized CBTO, such as in the community of Quebrada Ancha. Both CALM and GESPP seemed interested in expanding the reaches of their cooperatives to include more aspects of community life; the name Cooperativa Agropecuaria Las Mozas speaks for itself.

Institutional Support

One major indicator of success for CBTOs was institutional support received. CTQA was and continues to be aided by Fondación Chagres and Christian Strassnig. They were given the push to organize, and they took that opportunity in stride as they continue to remain a united and cohesive group. Fondación Chagres offers them building materials and funded their apiary project, which generates income for the community. These donations were used to the community’s advantage, offering the tourism organization a place to host groups. Strassnig, while not part of an institution was an
integral part of their unity. His constant involvement and personal commitment to the
success of CTQA offers them a support system beyond their community.

While Santa Fe does not have much institutional support they are founded on a
legacy of cooperatives and community involvement. They were aided by IPACOOOP at
the beginning and have since moved on to expand their project and member base. Santa
Fe has two cooperatives present, CTSF and La Cooperativa La Esperanza de los
Campesinos (CEC), most members of CTSF are also members of CEC. Having this
previous knowledge, and strong relationship with IPACOOOP has given then an advantage
in their organization and success as a cooperative.

GESPP and CALM were given the rights to the land, and therefore the right to
organize by the municipal government. GESPP mentioned being helped by IPACOOOP
and became a legal cooperative through it. Unfortunately, many government agencies
within Panama are quite weak and therefore their support can be limited.

Over-arching institutions have the ability to offer support from a third-party
perspective. Their input can help change how affective the organization is and how they
can take the steps necessary to develop further, in other words, it starts them off with
more capacity. In addition, it seems clear that help from non-governmental organizations,
private individuals, and knowledge sharing between CBTOs are much more effective
forms of institutional support than that of the government.
DISCUSSION

The Viability of Community-Based Tourism Organizations as a Framework for Development

The creation of community-based tourism organizations (CBTO) appear to be a feasible route for many communities with tourism potential. Both social and financial benefits are a clear consequence of CBTO development that spread throughout the community, while membership in a tourism organization helps to diversify livelihoods and offers varying degrees of supplemental income. While it is clear that development of such organizations cannot occur overnight and the trajectory and final product will be different for each, a few guiding themes were clarified by this research process. In addition, it is important that the initiative is community-led in order to ensure sustainability and commitment to the CBTO.

The success of the tourism industry, particularly when the attraction is an area where locals often go, depends on local support (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). That is the reality for El Valle de Antón, where our proposed Corona de El Valle trail is situated. Several communities could benefit from the creation of a CBTO in their community, though lack of resources, both financial and human-based, is a huge threat to the success of such an endeavor. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon point out that the implementation of the tourism industry in a community is first put through a cost-benefit analysis by the residents involved (2011). The satisfaction of the community is an important factor any tourism industry needs to account for (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). Throughout the world, tourism has proven to be a good alternative source of income for households (Yang et al, 2009). Those that can involve themselves in the preparation and selling of goods to tourists can avoid relying on agriculture, and ensure the family more stability
(Yang et al, 2009). As Yang et al point out, the money made can also go into the community and aid with different programs and development (2009).

Yang et al rightly argue that “tourism development should be accompanied by a policy of reducing cumulative environmental impacts”, and a cohesive group of people working together have more power to enforce that (2009). Johnson and Tyrell mirror that point, stating that sustainable tourism is in the hands of the local residents as they have the power over the natural resources and the area as a whole (2008). While one may assume the main goal of tourism is profits, the upkeep and stability of the natural wonder or resource is also at play (Johnson and Tyrell, 2008). Through our interviews we were able to see what Johnson and Tyrell discussed. Profits can inevitably help the community and the households involved in the endeavor, but the connection to the land and the natural resource was definitely prominent. The communities are deeply attached to the land, all members currently reside around the attraction, and most have lived there for their entire lives. As such, it is no surprise that they feel a natural connection to the land, one that goes beyond monetary earnings. The connection between the ability to make profits and upkeep the area is a winning duo for the people, one that should not be understated.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: Assessing Community-Based Tourism Organizations

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) is part of a larger Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), which aims to “improve understanding of the livelihoods of poor people. It draws on the main factors that affect poor people’s livelihoods and the
typical relationships between these factors” (IFAD, 2014). With our assessment we place CBTOs at the centre of the SLF.

The SLF makes an assessment of the livelihood assets of the members of the organizations, what they have access to and use such as knowledge, natural resources etc. (IFAD, 2014). The vulnerability context influences the extent of access to these resources and takes account of trends, such as economic and political (IFAD, 2014). Another important influence are the prevailing social and political institutions which “affect the way people combine and use their assets to achieve their goals” (IFAD, 2014). All of this combines to better understand livelihood strategies. A schematic of the SLF can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

![Schematic of the SLF](image)

It must be noted that the vulnerability context plays a distinct role in the ability for a tourism organization to remain sustainable and successful. The vulnerabilities on the SLA are shocks, trends and seasonality. Panama, like all tropical countries inevitably
deals with distinct seasonal change. Food insecurity is a growing reality for rural families, as the weather patterns continue to change and the dry season lasts longer than anticipated every year. As such, supplemental jobs offer a way to counter the negative impacts. The tourism organizations are highly dependent on the dry season to bring in tourists.

However, beyond just weather, they are dependent on the stability of the country, the relative prices of goods and the abundance of attractions to bring people in. As travelers are risk averse, any major disaster or issue, be it political, social or natural will veer them away from Panama, as such, avoidance of those shocks (to any possible degree) is necessary. One issue Panama has been battling is drug trafficking, an issue that might impede travellers from visiting the booming country. Although the tourism organizations themselves cannot battle that issue independently, they can publicize the safety of their site.

The tourism organizations interviewed can also be seen as vulnerable since their access to technology is limited. Their ability to promote their business is lacking, which is a distinct issue for travelers today who often prepare for a trip beforehand and have easier access to widely communicated tourist attractions. For CTQA, Strassnig has given them an online presence, however, they are unable to control the web space alone since they have no internet in their community. Yet, they were optimistic about change through time, as they hope to be more present online alongside Strassnig.

Access to education can also be seen as a negative trend. For some lower class families, the education sector is limited for them. It would inevitably help if the families were able to pursue all levels of education for their children, which could feed back to
family income and the organization in which their parents are a part (as they will bring
more knowledge). Sources of credit did not seem like a notable issue for the
organizations we spoke to, however, one could guess that if their access to credit
increased they could offer more services and hopefully guarantee themselves a solid
tourist base.

Rural workers have an incredible amount of knowledge from previous generations
to pass on to the generations that will follow. The *livelihood assets* are a combination of
their skills, natural resources and capacity. The cooperatives and committee have social
capital which includes their family and community, offering them social support. The
human capital is in reference to their children and all those who are willing to work in the
project and take it on in the future. The natural capital is the resource the group is based
around, i.e. waterfalls, a historical trail, or mountains. The financial capital is what they
can fundraise together. In the cases of the organizations discussed, there is an entry fee
and from there, the members are able to see financial results. The physical capital is the
labor involved and the members who are willing and able to help maintain the area. The
results of their labor do not necessarily lead directly to financial gain, but that end is
inevitable if the site remains clean and functioning.

*Policies and institutions* can have positive and negative effects on the small
organizations. While IPACOOP has offered support to both GESPP and CTSF,
government institutions in Panama are known to be weak in some capacity. However, for
the purpose of this paper, IPACOOP aided both cooperatives deal with the obstacles of
claiming an area as their own. Yet, to counter IPACOOP’s positive impacts, foreign
enterprises have the seed money to build up an area and they do not have to worry about
community involvement. Additionally as mentioned, “The Tourism Incentive Law” of 1994 has enticed foreigners to settle in Panama and drive up land costs (Mapes, 2009). Above all, increased foreign investment due to government tax breaks make it difficult for small organizations to compete with big firms (Mapes, 2009). However, tourism organizations have the ability to succeed despite the competition from institutions and investors with deep pockets. The community involvement and social cohesion of the people offers them the upper hand, along with their knowledge of the area.

The *Livelihood strategy* in reference to this topic is the decision to work in a tourism organization to supplement household incomes. Although currently the vast majority of the people in the three cooperatives and one committee work in agriculture or the service sector, they have the possibility to work less in the years to come and put more focus into the tourism organization.

As stated with the SLA, *livelihood outcomes* can be numerous. More income and increased well-being are at the forefront. When a supplement to one’s income is available the vulnerability decreases, specifically in regards to food security. Households can prioritize their needs and ensure food is available all year around. In reference to tourism organizations, a stable and well publicized foundation will allow the group to flourish and see gains. There is hope that tourism organizations can lean on this supplemental livelihood more and more in the years to come, in order to increase their income further.

**Supplemental Livelihoods and the Future of El Valle: La Corona de El Valle Proposal**

Through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, community-based tourism development can act to strengthen and diversify the livelihoods of the rural poor, both within and surrounding El Valle de Antón. The product developed throughout our
internship, *La Corona de El Valle* Proposal (see Appendix F), is an attempt to do just that: diversify and supplement livelihoods through the promotion of a new sort of tourism. This proposed trail takes hikers through a variety of landscapes and into the countryside surrounding El Valle, not simply the town centre. This proposal aims to include *campesinos* in the benefits of increased tourism, not simply foreign investors or large-scale producers.

While benefits are plenty (the increase of social and financial capital) and multiply through the community, several limitations are clear. Though many communities appeared to be interested in the idea of offering services to passing tourists, most noted that we were the first tourists they had ever seen in their communities. Therefore, not only is it difficult for individuals to conceive of tourists passing through, it is difficult to get people “on board” with Caminando Panamá’s project in the region.

Another limitation faced by communities is resources. Other communities we visited in our research project had been aided by private individuals, NGOs, and/or Foundations and were much more productive and better organized for offering more cohesive tourism “packages”. Unless aided by a third-party, it can be difficult for communities to organize, especially if they have little idea of what the end product could and should look like. In addition, without capital resources, starting a viable tourism operation can be a serious challenge.

Currently two cooperatives exist in El Valle de Antón. Should popularity of *La Corona de El Valle* increase, creating a community-based tourism organization (committee or cooperative) may be an effective route for communities along the trail to take. By sharing knowledge, costs, and challenges, the creation of a community-based
tourism organization for the entire area may act to increase the benefits and decrease the stress for all. Clearly this proposal is only the first step; signage, clean-up, and publicity must first be addressed in order to make this a viable trail that can attract tourism and therefore increase the need for organization by people involved. Involving community members must also be addressed as currently most seem skeptical of the idea that tourism could increase through their hamlets and towns; simply the lack of current tourism makes it hard to conceive. Though far from conception, the creation of a community-based tourism organization for our proposed route has potential to increase and diversify livelihoods around and within El Valle de Antón.

CONCLUSIONS

The creation of CBTOs appears to be a viable route for many communities with tourism potential. Benefits, both social and financial are a clear consequence of CBTO development that spread throughout the community; membership in a CTSF helps to diversify livelihoods and offers varying degrees of supplemental income. While it is clear that development of such organizations cannot occur overnight and that the development and final product will be different for each, a few guiding themes have been clarified by this research process. In addition, it is important that the initiative is community-led in order to ensure sustainability and commitment to the CBTO.

In El Valle de Antón where our proposed Corona de El Valle trail is situated, several communities could benefit from the creation of a CBTO in their community, though lack of resources, both financial and human-based, is a huge threat to the success of such an endeavour. It would be extremely exciting if the development of a CBTO
including communities and individuals along the entire trail were able to form. Such cohesion when dealing with tourism has the potential to increase both tourist satisfaction and decrease risks for those involved. Regardless of what comes, we recommend that Caminando Panamá work with communities that will be incorporated into the trail in order to help develop the capacity to capitalize on potential tourism development as studied CBTOs have done.


ROAD SCHOLAR. (2012). *Birds of Panama: The Canal Zone and Chiriqui Highlands*. 45


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Interview Questions

1. PREGUNTAS POR LAS COOPERATIVAS

Cuando comenzó la cooperativa?

Como recibieron ustedes la autoridad a empezar una cooperativa aquí?

Cuántos son ustedes (en la cooperativa)?

Hace la cooperativa dinero/beneficios cada año?

Cuántos personas vienen cada año?

Cómo divide los ingresos de la cooperativa? Hay un porcentaje por los mantenimientos del sitio?

Qué tipo de servicios ofrecen ustedes?

Hay competición con las empresas privadas?

Hablan con las otras cooperativas en El Valle para compartir ideas etc.?

Si ANAM se da la autoridad a comenzar una cooperativa a la entrada del Gaital, comenzaría una allí?

2. PREGUNTAS PERSONALES

Cuando unió usted a la cooperativa?

Tiene otro trabajo?

La cooperativa se da dinero? Es posible a sobrevivir con esta renta?

Piensa que una cooperativa es una buena sistema de dirección por los sitios turísticos?

Hay conflictos entre la gente de la cooperativa?
APPENDIX B: TCPS 2: CORE Ethics Certificates

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Emily Murdock

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: 1 April, 2014

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Sabrina Dabby

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: 12 January, 2014
APPENDIX C – Map of the Corona de El Valle
Caminando Panamá es una organización no gubernamental que se centra en el turismo ecológico y en la participación de las comunidades. Una parte de nuestro proyecto fue el mapeo de El Valle y la corona (las montañas adyacentes) para atraer a la gente a visitar El Valle y caminar por sus senderos.

La otra parte de nuestro proyecto es el aprender sobre las cooperativas en El Valle de Antón y determinar si su trabajo en la cooperativa es suficiente como una forma de vida alternativa.
APPENDIX E - Community Interview Raw Data

LEGEND
ID: Grupo Ecoturistico Sendero Pierda Pintada
LM: Cooperative Agroturistica Las Mozas
QA: Comité de Turismo Quebrada Ancha
SF: Cooperativa de Turismo de Santa Fe

DATA
Cuando comenzó la cooperativa?
ID: The cooperative began in 2007
LM: The cooperative began in October of 2012
QA: The committee began in 2008 (because of the Camino Real)
SF: Legally became a cooperative in 2007

Como recibieron ustedes la autoridad a empezar una cooperativa aquí?
ID: The land belongs to the municipality and they were given the right to do that by the national government in part with the Institution Cooperativas de Panama to improve the tourism sector of the community.
LM: The land is municipal but was granted to them by the corregimiento (the representatives). They are a solo project independent of the coop commission.
QA: They began as a committee and remained that way. They seem to be indifferent about being a legal cooperative.
SF: Have their legal status as cooperative through IPACOOP.

¿Cuántos son ustedes (en la cooperativa)?
ID: The cooperative currently has 33 members.
LM: The cooperative currently has 12 members (the same ones that began the cooperative).
QA: The committee currently has 21 people.
SF: The cooperative is currently about 56 members.

Hace la cooperativa dinero/beneficios cada año?
ID: Yes, but very little. You need another job, you cannot gain a livelihood with just a coop. The hope is to work together to expand the cooperative in order to make it a full-time livelihood. They’re diversifying their program to become more of a community group. Their activities include raising chickens and farming. They want to ensure that they have a lot of different activities and they are not solely focused on tourists.
LM: Sometime they make money, sometimes they don’t, it is variable. They definitely cannot live off of the money made. (They are stationed there because if they weren’t someone else would be, and it is up to them to protect their area).
QA: The people cannot depend solely on the committee for money, there is not enough people coming through currently.
SF: The cooperative is more of an agency. Dues are paid to the cooperative annually (20 USD) which is the cooperatives only form of income.
Cuántos personas vienen cada año?
ID: No exact count kept.
LM: They have a mix of nationals and tourists. No exact count kept.
QA: 65 people came in 2013 – increasing every year.
SF: Unsure about this data. Zobaida herself had about 8 people stay with her last year.

¿Cómo divide los ingresos de la cooperativa? Hay un porcentaje por los mantenimientos del sitio?
ID: People make money based on how often they work (an hourly wage), they put money towards maintenance and it is collected through dues (everyone pays a bit to be part of the cooperative).
LM: The coop does make money, all divided by the amount you work (hourly wage). A percentage of the profits are devoted to maintenance and new projects (trail maintenance, seating areas and building bridges).
QA: Everyone helps maintain the site and keep it clean. The money is devoted to the people that work. The committee meets and decides who is going to work.
SF: Money is paid to members based on the services they provide. Money for maintenance is taken from dues paid by members.

¿Qué tipo de servicios ofrecen ustedes?
ID: The services are the trail and bathroom and on the weekends private merchants are there to sell artisanal products and food. The cooperative offers free advertisement for “Ocho Panama”, a hiking and repelling company (laminated papers with picture and information at the paying booth).
LM: Their services include food on the weekends, bathrooms, a seating area, the natural waterfalls and river. There is no need for guides.
QA: Services offered: Food, Camino Real, cultural, bees (ruta de miel) and artisanal handicrafts, and a newly built outdoor area to pitch tents and hang hammocks.
SF: Currently they do predominantly tours, guiding, and affordable rural lodging for tourists. They are looking into the creation of packages to become more competitive against private establishments who dominate the tourism industry.

¿Hay competición con las empresas privadas?
ID: No competition was expressed.
LM: No competition was expressed.
QA: No competition was expressed.
SF: The cooperative was created in order to combat the control of the tourism industry by private enterprises (hotels, tour operators etc.)

¿Hablan con las otras cooperativas que para compartir ideas etc.?
ID: The only other cooperative they are involved with is an agricultural coop called La Libertad.
LM: They speak to the Sandero Pintada. (Authors Note: La India Dormida did not mention any connections to Las Mozas).
QA: They speak to the neighboring Embera communities (two of them) who also work in the tourism industry. They help each other out, particularly with boats.
SF: They get a lot of indirect support from La Cooperativa de Esperanza de los Campesinos in Santa Fe one of the biggest and longest standing cooperatives in Panama. Most members of the tourism cooperative are members of the larger cooperative and so have a good understanding of how to work together and function as a cooperative.

Si ANAM se da la autoridad a comenzar una cooperativa a la entrada del Gaital, comenzaría una allí?
ID: They argue that a cooperative is a community endeavor. When asked whether he would be willing to take over ANAM’s booth at El Gaital, they argued that it is not theirs to take. A cooperative should be run by the community, and the community around El Gaital should be the beneficiaries.

How often do you meet?
ID: They meet each month to discuss.
LM: They meet every Tuesday.
QA: They meet multiple times a week because there are different activities going on in the community – gives them the opportunity (cultural nights, church, school functions). They can meet up to four times a week.
SF: Legally they must meet once a month. All members of the Board must be present.

How do people join the cooperative/committee?
ID: If someone would like to enter they are invited to a meeting, explained the processes and if they are on board, they are allowed to join
LM: We vote them in democratically
QA: To join the group, people are democratically allowed in. The committee explains the responsibility of the position. In the group, everyone lends a hand. If there is no problem/objection, the person is in.
SF: People can join at will but must pay a 5 USD inscription fee.

Extra information:
Prices:
ID: Extranjeros: $2.25, Nacionales: $1.75, Ninos: $1.00
LM: Adultos: $1.00, Retired: $0.75, Ninos: $0.50
SF: Average nightly price of $10

What is the breakdown of men and women?
ID: The coop is mostly women, but there are a few men
LM: Mixed men and women
QA: The committee includes men and women. They say that children are also part of the committee because they dance in the spectacles.
SF: Mixed

Where are the coop members from?
ID: They are all from the areas right around La Piedra Pintada.
LM: All from the sector directly around Las Mozas
QA: All from the community
SF: All from Santa Fe and the surrounding communities

2. PREGUNTAS PERSONALES
Cuando unió usted a la cooperativa?
ID: From the beginning
LM: From the beginning
QA: From the beginning
SF: From the beginning

Tiene otro trabajo?
ID: Yes
LM: Most people have another job. (For our interview: three of the interviewees have other jobs and the youngest member with a child does not).
QA: Yes
SF: Chicken farming and selling organic fertilizer.

La cooperativa se da dinero? Es posible a sobrevivir con esta renta?
ID: No, it is not possible.
LM: No, especially since the work is variable in the winder time, if it is raining the cooperative members do not go.
QA: No, the people cannot depend solely on the committee for money, they work in fishing (there are more fish this year than last year) and agriculture (a lot of them have coffee plantations) predominately.
SF: This is a livelihood diversification for many but this could be a full time occupation for those interested in having guests constantly. Its all about a members interest.

Piensa que una cooperativa es una buena sistema de dirección por los sitios turísticos?
ID: This is a service to the country, it is a way to put Panama on the map alongside Costa Rica as a tourism destination. He is hoping to change the tourism industry, create something similar to Canada or the United States. Coops are a good opportunity for tourist areas.

Hay conflictos entre la gente de la cooperativa?
ID: Yes, sometimes there are conflicts of how decisions should be made, but the coop is run in a democratic way.
LM: There are conflicts sometimes, but they are always worked out.
QA: They are all friends, they have disagreements sometimes (he said it is inevitable), but they are always able to work it out.
APPENDIX F – *La Corona de El Valle* Proposal for Caminando Panamá

*La Corona de El Valle*
An Internship with Caminando Panamá

Presented to Adrian Benedetti and Cristina Maduro
Presented by Emily Murdock and Sabrina Dabby
Proposal 2014

McGill University
Montreal, Canada
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3

Benefits .............................................................................................................................. 3

*La Corona de El Valle* .................................................................................................. 5
  La India Dormida ........................................................................................................... 5
  La Cara Iguana .............................................................................................................. 6
  El Macano to Las Margaritas Loop .............................................................................. 7
  Mata Ahogado Road ...................................................................................................... 8
  El Gaital ......................................................................................................................... 10

Signage Recommendations ............................................................................................ 11

Communities/Cooperative ............................................................................................. 12

Steps Forward .................................................................................................................. 12

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 13

Works Cited .................................................................................................................... 15

Appendix A - Map of the Corona de El Valle ............................................................... 16

Appendix B - GPS Waypoint Descriptions ................................................................. 17
Introduction

El Valle de Antón is a sleepy little town nestled in the hills of Coclé province. The destination of choice for much of the Panamanian elite, El Valle sits in the crater of an extinct volcano, lending to its unique climate and variety of landscapes. Though El Valle is surrounded by the potential for adventure eco-tourism with countless trails and natural water features, very few of these opportunities have been exploited, either by local communities or private enterprises. Very few of the wealth of trails surrounding El Valle are known, and even fewer are marketed, leaving the areas potential for adventure tourism untapped by foreign and domestic markets.

According to the Adventure Tourism Development Report, tourism is qualified as adventure tourism “if it involves two of the following three elements: (1) interaction with nature, or (2) interaction with culture, or (3) a physical activity.” (2012) Though El Valle de Antón has all the elements necessary to become an adventure tourism destination, surveys conducted by the authors between February and April of the Panamanian public, showed that El Valle de Antón is not perceived as such. Promotion of the Corona de El Valle trail has the benefit of including all three of these core elements for it incorporates physical activity, Panamanian campesino culture, and interaction with nature. With proper marketing, El Valle’s tourism market can be expanded and transformed providing benefits to all.

Benefits

The natural untapped beauty and potential of El Valle can easily lead to benefits for the people. The economic benefits of the development of the Corona de El Valle trail are diverse, but most specifically an increase in tourism that has the potential to directly lead to jobs. Since the people from the town and surrounding areas know the trails, the diversity, and the stories, their participation can be invaluable. Local people can work as guides, or by providing services along the route, such as rural lodgings or food provisions. As the authors determined through interviews, all the inhabitants of the houses asked at random, were willing to participate in the tourism industry as it can diversify their livelihoods. As such, households would be able to supplement their income with tourism.
Another benefit is the increased spending throughout the town. As more tourists arrive, local businesses can benefit from added cash inflow. There is a farmers market in the main square of town, but a smaller market of farmers from the surrounding communities is hoping to pick up business and expand their presence from the mere biweekly market to the weekly market. More tourists would allow smaller endeavors to thrive with the increased foot traffic through the area, increasing opportunities for small businesses, and additional livelihoods.

By cleaning the trails and advertising them, the infrastructure of the city as a whole, would have the opportunity to flourish. The public spaces can become more user friendly with benches and a welcoming town square where locals could meet. El Valle has a long history of being a haven for the rich elite, however, before their arrival El Valle was home to farmers and campesino workers. Although most live on the outskirts of the city, their community history and identity should be reinvigorated, beyond the one museum in El Valle.

Despite being a beautiful little town, like many others, El Valle is plagued by litter scattered around the streets and highway. With an increase in tourism, especially adventure and nature based, tourists might incline the local government to implement a more viable garbage collection plan. The trickledown effect could be cleaner streets. A greater focus on the importance of conserving areas as a result of tourism could be an interesting and beneficial result.

It is important to acknowledge the constraints increased tourism can impose on communities. There is no need to recreate a new El Valle, and bringing in external powers may misguidedly do that. Negative impacts may occur if tourism development is not monitored. Expanding areas can be threatened by increased pressure on the environment and species. Tourism is an addition to the community, in no way should the community uproot their culture in order to implement the industry. It is important to remain sustainable.

Panama’s potential for adventure tourism is present, but it will require a lot of forethought and time. Trails however, can be completed and travelled on quickly with the proper signage. Implementing adventure tourism in El Valle can be a seamless process,
providing benefits for both local people and tourists, however constraints and limitations do exist for the communities involved.

**La Corona de El Valle**

**Trail Segments**

*La Corona de El Valle* can be conceived in five predominante trail segments that can be completed as one single hike, or separately; each segment can be both an ‘entrance’ and an ‘exit’, should hikers prefer to return to town each night. *La Corona de El Valle* is a spectacular experience, as it takes you through a multitude of landscapes in a short amount of time, lending to the exceptional biodiversity found in the Isthmus of Panama.

1. La India Dormida
2. La Cara Iguana
3. El Macano to Las Margaritas Loop
4. Mata Ahogado Road
5. El Gaital

**La India Dormida**

**Description:** *La India Dormida* is a wellknown and clear trail that is “maintained” by the tourism cooperative *Grupo Ecoturistico Sendero Piedra Pintada*. Several entrances exist for this trail, namely at her ‘head’ where an entrance fee is charged by the cooperative, and at her ‘foot’ which attaches near Cerro de Cruces. In order to enhance community development, we encourage hikers to pay the entrance fee (2.25USD for foreigners). In addition, this route flows better within the loop.

Walking up to the head is a steep incline through tropical dry forest, the most common forest in Panamá. The trail is lined with nice bathing areas and cascades along the way. Upon reaching the ‘Indian’s head’, hikers can take in beautiful vistas of the town and surrounding mountains. The rest of trail consists of grassy hills and volcanic rock typical of Panama’s *archo seco* and the crater.

**Recommendations:** Speak with the cooperative about investing in signage that is more accessible to tourists. Though this trail is well known and maintained, some signage
is lacking at specific points when hiking to the head, which could lead to people unfamiliar with the trail getting lost.

Difficulty: 2.1-2.5: This rating fluctuates depending on an individual’s fitness level and hiking ability. This trail combines both easy sections and several that require more physical effort. In addition, some sections are extremely steep over volcanic rock. Completion of this segment takes 2-3 hours.

La Cara Iguana

Description: La Cara Iguana is a much less travelled, and far more challenging trail than the previous segment, La India Dormida. From the connection found through Las Mozas, getting to La Cara Iguana from La India Dormida no longer needs to be made by walking through town. Instead, the spectacular waterfalls can now be incorporated into the El Valle hiking loop. Therefore, entrance to La Cara Iguana is approximately 1 USD (entrance to Agroturistico Las Mozas).

The first part of the trail, which goes through Las Mozas cooperative, is a quick hike through steep land, which offers some breath taking views. The hike takes you through campesino lands and tropical dry forest. Overall, this portion is a fairly easy hike, and much more pleasant than the road previously used for access.

La Cara Iguana itself is a much more intense hike that should only be attempted by individuals confident in their hiking ability. The terrain is mostly sparse grassland and volcanic rock, with a few pine glens that can be used as campsites for the more adventurous. The hike offers amazing views of the valley as the majority of the trail follows hill ridges. The section ends by following a campesino trail called La Pita by locals. Hikers can choose to descend into town by following this trail or continue on to the third segment.

Recommendations: Speak with the cooperative Agroturistico Las Mozas to make sure a secure bridge across the river can be maintained. Along the connection, several barbed wire fences exist that may need gates to make passage easier for tourists, or those unfamiliar with barbed wire fencing. Due to the variety of landscapes that hikers will cross – road, farmland, forest, grassland – during this segment, signage is of utmost importance for this trail, in order for individuals to go the right way.
A lot of work must be done on La Cara Iguana itself due to the poor condition of the trail. Signage is desperately needed along the trail because it often disappears into the grass – a lot of guesswork is necessary, especially if the hikers do not have a GPS. In addition, there is one site where the path dips into a valley between the ridges, which has become overgrown by forest. This must be cleared if people are to find their way through.

**Difficulty: 3.6:** High winds speed over steep, thin ridges making this hiking trail relatively dangerous. In addition, in some places the trail is almost non-existent and very difficult to follow. Terrain can very steep and difficult to climb, and should be carefully traversed. Sections through Las Mozas up to La Cara Iguana Protected Area are quite easy. Until adequate maintenance is done and signage is up, hikers should be using a GPS. Completion of this segment takes 3-4 hours.

**El Macano to Las Margaritas Loop**

**Description:** If hikers are coming from town they can either walk along the highway to El Macano road or they can take the bus (approximately 0.20USD). If hikers are continuing from La Cara Iguana, they will follow well-travelled campesino routes across hill ridges until they descend into the road to El Macano.

This trail incorporates many different hiking environments as well as showcases the different landscapes that surround El Valle. Unpaved roads will take hikers through sleepy hamlet communities, while campesino trails will take them across rivers, up hills, across ridges, and into valleys. Hikers will be able to experience the breathtaking views of inland Coclé looking towards the oceans and the powerful winds of the area. In one such community, El Macano, a potential campsite, on flat ground covered with soft pine needles exists to avoid heading into town. Hikers will pass several remote fincas and several rivers that allow hikers a quiet repose with cool waters after walking in the hot sun.

At María Alfonso’s the hike takes once more to the road. Hikers will pass Mini Super Edith where snacks and cold drinks can be bought at reasonable prices. Once hikers reach the highway at Las Margaritas, they can catch a bus into El Valle or to the entrance of Mata Ahogado Road trail to continue on (0.20-0.60USD).
Recommendations: This segment of the loop has the most interaction with community members and rural campesinos. It is recommended that Caminando Panamá communicate with the hamlet of El Macano as this community seems interested in providing camping space as well as food to tourists if tourism picks up. Unfortunately, no tourists are coming as of yet – we were told several times we were the first ‘tourists’ anyone had ever seen in those areas.

The trail chosen crosses the private property of three families, all of whom seemed unbothered by our passing and welcome to the idea of people passing by their homes quickly. With further development of the trail, it is important that these families are continually consulted. It is recommended that hikers doing this as a day trip bring at least two litres of water for it is a long walk in the hot sun with nowhere to get potable water.

Contact: Graciel daughter of the owner of the first remote finca. # 64790048. Their neighbours are the mother and brother of María Alfonso. Several kilometres of the trail follow the path between these María’s house and her family’s. They were not yet comfortable giving their contact information, but acted as guides to us on this portion of the trail.

Difficulty: 2.7: As the majority of this trail follows unpaved and underutilized roads, the walk is relatively easy. Several kilometres of hiking, across ridges and through forest, make this hike a bit harder. The length of this trail, about 20 km, is what makes it most difficult, as it requires a full day of hiking. Completion of this segment takes 5-6 hours.

Mata Ahogado Road

Description: The beginning of this trail is off the central road that leads into El Valle, therefore hikers can take the bus, either from El Valle or Las Margaritas, which costs between 0.25USD and 0.45USD per person. Hikers will need to get off at the Mata Ahogado soccer field.

The majority of the trail follows campesino routes through the hills, passing through fincas and several rivers and streams. The vegetation is much more lush than the previous segment and gives a better sense of how predominantly subsistence farmers in the area practice agroforestry techniques.
A short portion of the trail follows the road that runs through the community of Mata Ahogado, which can offer hikers with a pit stop to buy snacks and water. In addition, community members mentioned that tourists and groups have stayed overnight at the school previously, making Mata Ahogado a potential pit stop for hikers. If you are lucky, you may run into farmers who will offer to sell you oranges or firewood, and show you their farms!

This trail connects effortlessly with the El Gaital loop and offers two options: hikers can walk back into town following a well maintained path along watercress plantations, or continue hiking up into the cloud forest.

**Recommendations:** Speak with members of the Mata Ahogado community further to gain contact information regarding ‘renting’ out the school. As the majority of the trail is used daily by farmers and people living in remote communities, they are relatively well maintained. Signage could be something to consider, but the trails are easy to follow and if the hiker has a GPS with the .gpx file, signs unnecessary.

**Community:** Nine members of the Mata Ahogado community were interviewed regarding their views on tourism. Every person interviewed saw increased tourism as both beneficial to and welcome in the community. Reasons mentioned for such a positive response were increased development opportunities and opportunity to share knowledge. In addition, they believe increased tourism will be beneficial to individuals in the community who will be able to sell artisanal goods, fruits, vegetables, water, etc. A group of four men mentioned that the community school can be used as campsite for passing hikers, and could also offer cooked food and toilets during the dry season.

**Difficulty:** 1.5: This trail segment is accessible to all, with only a few steep portions. Most of the trail follows rolling hills, and all segments are easy to follow. Only one river crossing requires caution to avoid having wet feet for the remainder of the hike. Completion of this segment takes about 2-3 hours.

**El Gaital**

**Description:** Those coming from town will likely need to taxi to the starting point, and walk the path alongside watercress plantations. Hikers continuing from the
previous segment will start their hike through meandering country roads, and pass by a large-scale chicken farm. The walk to the entrance of E Gaital is easy and calm, and the roads are well kept and regularly used.

Upon reaching the El Gaital mountain there is an ANAM booth that may or may not be occupied. The prices are as follows: Foreigner 5USD, National 2USD, Student 1USD. El Gaital is a very special part of the El Valle loop because it is the only portion that takes hikers to a cloud forest, a very special habitat with many primitive plants and a high level of epiphytic plants. There is a fantastic lookout at the top of the mountain.

Getting back into town from the El Gaital loop is an 8-10 km walk on unpaved and paved roads. Bus stops start to appear, so if hikers get tired, alternative transport does exist.

**Recommendations:** The actual El Gaital loop could be of concern in the rainy season as the path can be narrow at steep at points with a slippery path. ANAM should be consulted about cleaning up sitting areas and signs that give information about the flora and fauna commonly found in cloud forests. New plastic benches could be something to consider, as they will not degrade as wood does in such high humidity.

It was rumoured that another way down from El Gaital exists, but many people, including an employee from Canopy Adventures and an ANAM official mentioned that it is very dangerous. This is something to investigate for the future as it could hold potential for thrill-seeking hikers.

In addition, hikers should be recommended to bring a long sleeve shirt or sweatshirt as it can be cold at the peak.

**Difficulty:** 1.5 -1.7: If the entire segment is walked, it can be long. Additionally, some of the inclines within the El Gaital loop are steep and very slippery due to high moisture levels in the forest. Completion of this segment takes 3-4 hours.

**Sign Recommendations**

Given the diversity of environments throughout the hike, we would suggest wood signage throughout. However, an alternative would need to be decided for El Gaital. The cloud forest climate and high humidity levels will lead wood to rot, so metal signs and posts would be a good alternative. For these signs, maintenance is necessary. At the moment, there are metal signs throughout El Gaital that are covered in moss and illegible;
they either need to be cleaned or replaced. Proper upkeep of the trail would ensure minimal degradation to the signage.

According to “Signs, Trails, And Wayside Exhibits” a sign is an inscribed board, plate or space that communicates something to the viewer (2006). Signs can be divided into two categories: information signs and interpretative signs (Gross et al., 2006). Information signs will tell the direction, warnings, rules or guidance, and interpretative panels tell the story of the site or features (Gross et al., 2006). There should be directional signs throughout the route, as there are a lot of forks on the trail, or in some cases there is no trail. We suggest wooden posts with red arrows. The wood is a nice way to tie into the surrounding environment, more so than laminate or plastic signage, and the red will stand out. At certain points, if necessary, there should be a warning sign for dangers in the area (as deemed necessary). Additionally, it would be interesting to consider a wayside exhibit to kick off the whole trail. It would allow visitors to learn about the history of El Valle and the interesting aspects of the town and crown. It would be a good opportunity to show the map of the entire crown, with the main trails and the segmentation of the routes.

In addition, it might be interesting to work with the two cooperatives to put up signs detailing the legends associated with, respectively, La Piedra Pintada and Las Mosas cascades. This gives tourists a nice insight into the folklore of the valley and Coclé province.

Communities and Cooperatives

While involving communities in the benefits of increased tourism is integral to the success of changing the face of tourism in El Valle, certain limitations are faced. Though many communities appeared to be interested in the idea of offering services to passing tourists, most noted that we were the first tourists they had ever seen in their communities. Therefore, not only is it difficult for individuals to conceive of tourists passing through, it is difficult to get people ‘on board’ with Caminando Panamá’s project in the region.

Interviews with the two cooperatives active in El Valle and one in Santa Fe, Veraguas made it clear that communities get organized when a demand exists in order to ‘capitalize’ on the opportunity – for if they don’t someone else will. This sentiment
suggests that in areas surrounding El Valle, there simply isn’t enough foot traffic to elicit a response from the community.

Another limitation faced by communities is resources. Other communities we visited in our research project had been aided by private individuals, NGO’s, and/or foundations, and were much more productive and better organized offering more cohesive tourism ‘packages’. Unless aided by a third-party, it can be difficult for communities to organize, especially if they have little idea of what the end product could and should look like. In addition, without capital resources, starting a viable tourism operation can be a serious challenge.

Steps Forward/Promotion

Sentiments from community members interviewed in conjunction with internet surveys completed by the Panamanian public, suggest El Valle de Antón is not yet considered to be a location for adventure tourism. 63% of respondents noted that their main reason to visit El Valle was to ‘escape the city’ while only 25% indicated adventure. More importantly, 67% of those who said they didn’t hike much or at all in El Valle responded that they simply did not know where to go, while 88% of respondents stated they would hike more if they only knew where to go. This result suggests that promotion networks of the trails in El Valle are weak.

Using this information, we investigated what sort of information was being published about El Valle and disseminated to tourists. Two websites specific to El Valle de Antón currently exist on the internet with similar content. Collectively, only three trails are mentioned; El Gaital, La India Dormida, as well as a ‘tour’ at the Rio Indio located one hour from town. Much more focus is found upon wildlife and biodiversity centres, as well as expensive tours and businesses. Little information can be found upon a diversity of trails, though it is clear that they exist. In addition, we looked at two Panama specific guidebooks, Lonely Planet and Rough Guides, to see what is promoted by foreign publications in regards to hiking in El Valle. While they were more informative than the aforementioned websites regarding a diversity of hiking trails in the area, huge gaps in information remain present. Both guidebooks noted Cerro Gaital and La India

Dormida, but differed in information after that. Lonely Planet suggested four other trails in the area for ‘serious trekkers’, including Cerro Pajita and Cerro Guacamayo with no descriptive or logistical information pertaining to reaching the trailhead or length. Similarly, The Rough Guide mentioned a two-day trek all the way to Parque Nacional Alto de Campana but with little logistical information – a recurring issue as they mention a ‘wealth of hiking opportunities’ in El Valle but backed with little information of utility or substance.

Upon discussing this project with tourists and friends, the repeated sentiment was that Caminando Panamá should create a mobile app to get the hiking information and GPS coordinates. We have noticed that more often than not, tourists are equipped with their smartphones when they travel. We believe that this project can bring in more travellers if it appeals to the tech crowd as not everyone owns a GPS. Additionally, it will give travellers an opportunity to post comments and experiences right away if they are already using the site.

As El Valle de Antón is not currently advertised as a destination for neither hiking nor adventure tourism, the market potential has not yet been exploited. La Corona de El Valle is only the first step of many needed to change the face of tourism in El Valle de Antón. Improved accessibility to trails to the general public by Caminando Panamá is a welcomed opportunity.

Conclusions

El Valle de Antón has immense potential, as noted above, to expand both its adventure tourism sector and involvement of the local community in the process. The development of the proposed Corona de El Valle trail is only one step in this process, but can act to ‘jump start’ the trend. Caminando Panamá’s increasing presence in the media and other communities may have the ability to increase publicity of the newly proposed trail, effectively increasing public awareness of the variety and wealth of hiking trails present in the region.

Clearly this proposal is only the first step; signage, clean-up, and publicity must first be addressed in order to make this a viable trail that can act to attract tourism. Involving community members must also be addressed as currently most seem skeptical.
of the idea that tourism could increase through their hamlets and towns; simply the lack of current tourism makes it hard to conceive. Like any other project, the *Corona de El Valle* must start somewhere. Our hope is that this proposal and .gpx files can begin the invigoration of the tourism industry of El Valle de Anton.
Works Cited


APPENDIX A: Map of the Corona de El Valle
Appendix B: GPS Waypoint Descriptions

GPS Waypoints

Trail Head: The start point of the trail
*India Dormida:* Upon entering the site, there will be kiosks, a bathroom and a welcome booth. The prices are marked, and from there you can begin the hike.
*El Gaital:* Found in a more secluded area, the booth run by ANAM does not seem to be in current use. As such, you can start the hike right away.

Sites:
*Mirador:* Featured view point throughout the crown. Good photo opportunity.
*Canopy Adventure:* A well- known tourist attraction in the area, as there is a ropes course and a waterfall. It also is a good reference point
*Petroglyph:* Featured on the trail in La India Dormida, children are often there prepared to explain the petroglyphs (for a fee)
*Watercress:* Found at the beginning of the El Gaital trail.
* Zamia Acuminata:* Plant that is close to extinct but one is found in El Valle on La Pita road
*Bathing:* Good area to swim and eat
*Waterfall:* Good area to swim and eat
*Río Las Guías:* Located in the middle of the Las Margaritas hike, it is a good place to swim and rest
*Mato Ahogado River:* Good area to swim and eat

Maintenance:
*Clean Up Trees Rest Maintenance:* A rest area that need to be cleaned at El Gaital
*Huge Clean Up:* At one point on the Cara Iguana, a clean up is needed to create a trail
*Deforest Clean Up:* Found on the route to El Gaital
*Fence:* Currently there is a barbed wire fence that needs to be turned into a door
*Access:* Need to create an access point
*Shaky Watercress Bridge:* Needs to be repaired or fortified on the Mata Ahogado Road Segment.

Reference Points:
*El Valle Main Road*
*End Point Near Town:* Meeting up with the main road
*La Cabeza:* La India Dormida
* Dragon’s Mouth:* Boca Del Dragon Trail
*Good Trail Start:* Near Boca Del Dragon
*El Macano:* The beginning of the trail off of the highway
*Meet Road Car Iguana:* When the Las Mosas trail stops and meets the road

Signage:
*Fork:* A sign is necessary
*Veer right, veer left:* Need to put in directional signs on the trail
Rest Areas:
*Rest stop and Rest Area:* somewhere to eat and take a break
*Store La Mesa:* Store along the road going through La Mesa where water/snacks can be purchased.
*Possible sleep area pri:* Privately owned area with an expansive piece of land under pine trees. Perfect to pitch a tent.
*Another sleep:* Area in the community of El Macano
*MS Edith:* A mini super at the side of the road on the El Macano trail (they do not sell water). Note: it is the only mini super after a long walk.
*Latrine:* Bathroom

Contacts:
*School:* Have people sleep there (community): Found on the Mata Ahogado Road segment. People in the community said they would be willing to let people sleep in the school, similar to Santa Librada.
*House:* The owner said she wanted to be involved and that she is willing to sell water.
*Maria Alfonso:* Her house can be found on the El Macano walk, Mrs. Alfonso would like to be involved.
*Private property:* The El Macano trail goes through this property, it is important to confirm that they are okay with it.
APPENDIX G - Logistical Information

Work Log:
Santa Librada, Colón: 3 days
El Valle de Antón, Coclé: 13 days
Quebrada Ancha, Colón: 1 day
Santa Fe, Veraguas: 1 day
Number of Field Days (8 hours per day): 18 days
Number of Work Days in Panama City (8 hours per day): 19 days
Total number of days spent on the internship: 37 days

Financial Expenditures:
Number of trips to El Valle: 3
Price of round trip bus ticket to El Valle: 8.5 USD (8.5x3=25.5 USD)
Price of food (on average) per day in El Valle: 7 USD (7x13=91 USD)
Cost of park fees throughout our stays: 6 USD
Cost of day trip to Quebrada Ancha: 50 USD
Living expenses: 0 USD
Total funds spent on internship (per person): 172.5 USD