

Honey and jam in **Mexico**

Supporting sustainable livelihoods for
Maya communities



the **Travel**
Foundation



Case Study

We set up two projects that enabled small Maya enterprises to access the tourism market, whilst remaining in their communities



Cancun and the Riviera Maya are rapidly growing destinations. From just 1,500 guest rooms in 1995, the region now has more than 90,000 rooms and receives over ten million tourists annually.

This rapid growth has created a wealth of new employment and business opportunities. But for some Maya people living in rural areas, with generally low literacy levels and minimal Spanish language skills, employment has largely been confined to lower paid jobs in hotels on the coast. These positions often require leaving the community and living in Cancun. As a result, the cultural cost of tourism has been, in some cases, a progressive loss of identity and place, the dying out of cultural traditions, and the breaking up of families.

In response to these issues, we set up two projects that demonstrate how to enable small community enterprises to access the tourism market, whilst remaining in their communities. The projects specifically support sustainable livelihoods for two different Maya communities:



Pithahí Jungle jams: A group of Maya women based in Chumpón (over 250km from Cancun), making a range of jams from locally-produced fruits.



Much Kaab: A co-operative of beekeepers based in "Los Juárez", 60km from Cancun, making honey-based products, including shampoo, soap, creams and lip balms.

Our approach

Our focus has been two-fold

1. We have supported these micro-enterprises to supply goods and services that meet tourism market needs. Taking a community-led approach, our role has been to provide the necessary skills and to facilitate linkages with the tourism industry. Taking expert advice, the community groups decided what products to produce, how to market them and who to sell to.
2. We have encouraged hotels to adjust their policies towards local, sustainable procurement.

In both of these areas, we have strived to ensure long-lasting benefits to the communities involved following the end of our direct support.

Additionally, in 2013, we initiated a 'Commitments for Conservation' initiative as part of Sustainable Tourism Expo, consisting of a 'matchmaking' service between micro-enterprises and tourism businesses, which resulted in product sales for an additional 29 producers from 4 communities.

Our partners for these projects have included:

- TUI UK & Ireland
- Thomas Cook
- Cooperative Travel
- Local and regional governments
- NGOs
- Universities
- Hotel chains including Karisma Hotels & Resorts, Grand Park Royal Cancun Caribe and Hotel Grand Palladium Riviera Maya Resort and Spa.





What we did

We enabled two rural, small businesses to develop and sell their hand-made jam and honey-based products to large hotels.

Capacity building

We supported the two groups to develop their businesses, by providing training including in marketing, administration, accounting, information management and team work.

Product development

An important part of the skills development was to enable the two groups to develop products suitable for the tourism market. This included how to conduct product testing and develop a strong brand, as well as how to

meet legal, health and safety requirements.

Environmental protection

We supported Much Kaab to improve their bee-keeping practices to protect and conserve the endangered Melipona bee. Plus, we helped both groups to integrate sustainable environmental practice into their businesses.

Improved infrastructure

We supported both groups to improve their kitchen/production



areas to international health, safety and hygiene standards.

Creating links with hotels

A critical success factor for the project, was to facilitate a dialogue between these small community groups and large corporate organisations. We supported the creation of purchasing agreements with hotels which are being renewed annually, underpinning the long-term sustainability of the project. Plus, we worked with hotels to encourage them to change their procurement policies. We raised awareness within the industry of the benefits of buying locally by directly involving tour operator and hotel staff in the project and enabling them to see first-hand the challenges experienced by community enterprises.

“I’m very pleased to see first-hand that through our local procurement policy we are contributing to the growth of this amazing group of Mayan women. With their outstanding determination and an incredible sense of resilience, they don’t see obstacles; they only see challenging opportunities awaiting to be overcome!”

Carlos Da Silva

General Manager, Grand Park Royal Cancun Caribe



The Benefits

In recognition of our work in the region, the Travel Foundation received an award from the Quintana Roo Regional Government and the Regional Ministry of Tourism SEDETUR for its 'outstanding contribution to tourism and community development'.

For the communities

The two enterprises are enabling Maya people, predominantly women, to earn a living from tourism whilst working from their villages, rather than travelling for hours each day to the coast.

The groups' confidence and self-esteem have increased, enabling them to create new opportunities for their businesses. The increased income is helping to provide for improved education opportunities for families.

For the businesses

By buying these products, hotels are able to showcase their support

for local communities, whilst also providing authentic Maya products that enrich the holiday experience for their customers.

The products have helped to raise awareness about sustainable tourism with over 2 million tourists and tourism industry employees. Tour operator staff are re-thinking the way they do business. "It has driven me to change my excursion offerings and we now offer 5 different tours to local communities." TUI Area Manager, Mexico.

For the destination

Skills transfer between communities has opened up new opportunities for other micro-enterprises, helping to spread the benefits to further communities and empowering other Maya women to run their own small businesses.

The groups have presented at events and trade fairs and now act as positive role models, challenging traditional gender roles within the wider community.

Developing products which promote Maya culture has contributed to an enhanced sense of pride for Maya communities. Whilst awareness-raising activities within the wider community and





tourism industry have also led to a wider celebration of this culture.

Indigenous planting has helped double the honey group's Melipona bee population, supporting the conservation of an endangered species, and of the rainforest, as it is the only species that pollinates the upper stratum.

"This project is very important to me because it has given me the opportunity to have something different to help me develop, as a woman and within my community and later to have products to sell which can provide me with an income to be able to help educate my daughters"

Araceli Costillo, Much Kaab



In numbers

69 FAMILY MEMBERS BENEFIT FROM INCREASED INCOME



4 NEW CONTRACTS WITH HOTELS AND **7** NEW CONCESSIONS NEGOTIATED BY THE JAM GROUP SINCE OUR DIRECT SUPPORT ENDED

7,793KG

OF JAM PRODUCTS SOLD IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

**Over
£16,000**

IN ANNUAL JAM SALES, COMPARED TO £300 BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGAN

13 FURTHER SMALL BUSINESSES WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES HAVE BENEFITED THROUGH SUPPLY CHAIN LINKAGES, INCLUDING SUPPLYING RAW INGREDIENTS, TRANSPORTATION AND CONSTRUCTION.

Over 900

HOTEL STAFF MEMBERS HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN THE PROJECT - PROVIDING TRAINING, RAISING AWARENESS AND MORE



£17,000

IN SALES OF HONEY PRODUCTS TO 5 BUSINESSES IN THE FIRST 3 YEARS OF TRADING

11

LARGE HOTELS AND ONE GIFT SHOP CHAIN HAVE CHANGED THEIR PURCHASING POLICIES

£8,000

OF PRODUCT SALES FROM OUR 'COMMITMENTS FOR CONSERVATION' MATCHMAKING INITIATIVE

OVER 2 MILLION TOURISTS HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT THE PROJECTS

To find out how the Travel Foundation can help you create local supply chain linkages or more sustainable products, contact us at

partnerships@thetravelfoundation.org.uk

or Tel: +44 (0)1179273049 thetravelfoundation.org.uk

