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Nature-Oriented Tourism in Costa Rica and Ecuador: Diagnosis of Research Needs and Project Opportunities

By

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NATURE-ORIENTED TOURISM IN COSTA RICA AND ECUADOR:

DIAGNOSIS OF RESEARCH NEEDS AND PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES

June 1986

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This report presents personal observations and results of interviews in Costa Rica and Ecuador during the period May 11-31, 1986. The purpose of the visits was to identify opportunities for research and future projects that will promote the growth of nature-oriented tourism enterprise in the two countries. The intended focus was tourism marketing, but various supply constraints are discussed here, as well. I am deeply grateful to the persons whose names appear in Appendices A and B for their valuable time and sharing of ideas and information.

SUMMARY OF NEEDS

The needs in research and project development are itemized under three headings: PROMOTION, MARKETING SURVEYS, and MANAGEMENT. The listing does not indicate priorities, although MAN-1 is a logical first step towards organization of many of the other projects.

PROMOTION

PRO-1. Empirical quantification of the economic importance of nature-oriented tourism (national, regional, and/or local levels). Purpose is to create visibility for this activity, and to educate governments about the economic benefits to be derived from increased public expenditures on wildlands protection and management. For Costa Rica: specific analysis of the economic impact of OTS. For Ecuador: scope should include Sierra and Oriente, not just Costa and Galapagos.

PRO-2. Analysis of the volume, availability, quality, affordability, and distribution outlets of books, posters, postcards, maps, T-shirts, and other media which feature wildlands and natural history. Identification and justification of new opportunities (e.g., a book on "A Walking Nature Tour of Costa Rica"), suggestions for more effective designs, analysis of new distribution outlets, and recommendations for cost reduction and quality improvement. For Costa Rica: specific analysis of materials distributed through UNED.

PRO-3. Analysis of costs, cost-sharing arrangements (public/private, private/private), distribution channels, and specific target user groups (in North America and/or Europe) for videos and/or slide-tape shows of nature-oriented tourist attractions.

PRO-4. Analysis of content, cost, and cost-sharing arrangements for production of natural history "packages" (i.e., videos, slide-tape shows, brochures, sources of further information, and directory of private sector contacts) for use by airlines and by government tourist authorities in international trade fairs, fam tours and press tours, and other publicity events. Part of this analysis is linked with PRO-3.

MARKETING SURVEYS

MAR-1. Survey of national park visitors and other nature-oriented tourists with respect to natural history orientation and motivation, perceived quality of the experience, particular likes and dislikes, reasons for coming, intentions about return visits, etc. Survey could be linked with PRO-1. For Costa Rica: Survey could extend and amplify present surveys by Fundacion de Parques Nacionales.

MAR-2. Survey of the Specialty Travel Index (U.S.--Alpine Hansen Publishers) to determine the competitive position of Costa Rica and Ecuador in nature-oriented tourism as perceived by U.S. market wholesalers. Focus on separate segments (e.g, bird watching, botany, etc.), describe advantages and disadvantages of Costa Rica and/or Ecuador vs. competitors, and record suggestions for needed changes as related by the U.S. spokespersons.

MAR-3. Survey of a selected mix of U.S. nature associations, nature-related professional organizations, and university groups to identify constraints and potentials of attracting them for nature-oriented tourism in Costa Rica and/or Ecuador. For Costa Rica: special analysis of the role of former OTS students as return tourists or as promoters for Costa Rica (latter aspect linked with PRO projects).

MANAGEMENT

MAN-1. Organization of a national-level public/private council to define policies, programs, and projects for nature-oriented tourism. Exchange ideas and appoint working groups to achieve specific short-run and long-run goals, set priorities, and seek funding. Council composition to include representatives from tour operators, conservation leaders, national tourist authorities, airlines, and universities.

MAN-2. Design and implementation of a permanent data collection and management system on nature-oriented visitors to Costa Rica and/or Ecuador. Determination of what data are to be collected and for what reasons, incorporating recommendations by public and private sectors. Design of scientific sampling procedures, system for data base management, and system for report distribution.

MAN-3. Policy evaluation of fees collected by the national parks of Costa Rica and/or Ecuador with respect to efficiency, adequacy, and fairness.

MAN-4. Training program for natural history guides, based on needs and constraints in both public and private sectors. Recommended curricula, instructors, field training, and certification process. Analysis of costs, cost-sharing possibilities, employment prospects, and other factors affecting feasibility.

MAN-5. Development of management plans for particular national parks or private nature reserves. Inventory of resources, design of protection system, analysis of present and future visitation levels, establishment of preservation zones and visitation zones, access routes (trails and roads), maps and signs, camping and picnicing facilities (if relevant), visitor centers, interpretive materials (printed and audiovisual), and private concessions (for food, lodging, artisan shops, etc.). Projections of budgets and other financial considerations.

OBSERVATIONS AND BACKGROUND

1. Definition of Nature-Oriented Tourism

The concept of nature-oriented tourism is widely perceived to be one in which the tourist is drawn to a destination because of his or her interest in one or more features of that destination's natural history. The visit combines education with recreation. In Costa Rica one tour operator (Tikal) uses the patented term "ecotourism," although other tour operators prefer to speak of "tourism based on natural history." In Ecuador the tour operators have not yet adopted a formal approach to promoting tourism which is specifically nature-oriented, even though Galapagos trips feature natural history at the destination. But Ecuadorian tour operators clearly understand what is meant by ecotourism, ecological tourism, nature-related tourism, etc.

Nature-oriented tourism has "hard" and "soft" dimensions in two senses. The first hard-soft distinction refers to whether the interest in natural history is dedicated or casual. Dedicated natural history tourism is the kind practiced by ornithologists, botanists, geologists, or other professional specialists. This is the "hard" version of natural history tourism. Mario Boza of Costa Rica refers to this specialized visitation as "scientific tourism." Likewise, the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador attract among their visitors a segment of tourists who might also be termed "scientific tourists," even though others are visiting the Galapagos mainly because it is a well-known place in worldwide tourist circles.

In both countries, nature-based attractions also are a part of general-interest tourism. "Soft" natural history tourism mixes nature-oriented visits with other visits that feature any combination of beaches, deep sea fishing, shopping, culture, history, adventure (e.g., trekking, whitewater rafting), and other attractions. Thus a visit to one or more national parks may be just one component of a tour operator's package that also includes a number of other destinations.

The second hard-soft distinction refers to the physical rigor of the experience. Will the tourist have to walk miles into undeveloped backlands, sleep in a camp or crude shelter, and tolerate primitive sanitation conditions? Or will the tourist stay in high-quality accomodations, eat in good restaurants, and be conveyed to his/her destination in comfortable transport? Some of the "hard" tourism from the standpoint of narrow (pure)

natural history orientation falls into the "soft" category from the standpoint of physical rigor. It would seem that all four tourism types are possible in the following 4-cell matrix:

		Nature-Related Interests	
		"Hard" (Dedicated)	"Soft" (Casual)
Physical Rigor	"Hard" (Difficult)		
	"Soft" (Easy)		

2. Nature-Oriented Destinations

Nature-oriented tourism enterprise in both Costa Rica and Ecuador is oriented principally to visiting national parks and (in Costa Rica) biological reserves and wildlife refuges. In addition to national parks and reserves, each country has a small number of recreational parks near metropolitan areas, of importance more for weekend outings than for natural history interpretation. Finally, each country has a few private holdings that play important roles in natural history tourism.

Costa Rica.--The national parks receive about 200 thousand visits annually, two-thirds by Costa Ricans and one-third by internationals. According to data collected by the National Park Service, four destinations account for almost 90% of all visits to national parks. These are Volcan Poas, Volcan Irazu, Manuel Antonio, and Cahuita. Irazu is most popular with internationals, while Poas is most popular with Costa Ricans. Yet presumably many of the visits to Poas, Irazu, Manuel Antonio, and Cahuita are the "soft" general-interest kind of tourism, mixing visits to the parks with other attractions. Poas and Irazu offer comparatively easy terrestrial accessibility from San Jose, while Manuel Antonio and Cahuita are known for their beaches. The more highly specialized forms of natural history tourism probably take place at the less frequented parks and at the biological reserves.

The best-known examples of private holdings of significance for nature-related tourism are the properties of the Organization for Tropical Studies (especially La Selva Biological Station) and the Tropical Science Center (Monteverde Reserve). Another privately operated field station, Marenco, is located just outside of Corcovado National Park. Still another private project, Rara Avis, is proposing to build a forest lodge to demonstrate "rainforest conservation for profit."

A number of smaller and lesser-known private holdings are reportedly serving or being prepared to serve nature-related tourists. Information about the number, location, and natural history features of these smaller privately-owned properties is

poor. According to one reliable source, acquisition of land and/or facilities for nature-related tourism is attracting a great deal of entrepreneurial attention at the present time, and it would not be surprising to see increasing numbers of properties bought and sold on the basis of their potential for this kind of activity.

Ecuador.--The two most heavily visited national parks are Cotopaxi and Galapagos. Galapagos is said to receive 25 thousand visits per year (roughly 60% foreign, 40% national), with reported pressure on Ecuador's National Park Service to allow that number to increase. In the last 1-2 years Cotopaxi has received an estimated 70-90 thousand visits annually, with perhaps 90% of these visits being made by Ecuadorians on weekends and holidays. Thus the predominant form of tourism at Cotopaxi, certainly for Ecuadorian nationals, is the "soft" variety. All other Ecuadorian national parks are much less visited, although as in Costa Rica, visits to the less accessible national parks may be by those individuals who pursue the more highly specialized natural history interests.

Examples of private properties of importance for natural history tourism are Hotel Tinalandia (bird watching), the field station at Rio Palenque, Pasochoa (managed by Fundacion Natura), and a few lodges in the Amazon Basin (e.g, Hotel Anaconda, Hotel Jaguar, and Flotel Orellana). This is an incomplete listing, since (as in Costa Rica) information on private properties serving the nature-based tourism industry is inadequate.

3. Natural History Image and Attractions

Both Costa Rica and Ecuador claim the same comparative advantage in nature-oriented tourism, i.e., a large variety of ecosystems and natural diversity in a small country. This point was repeated many times by individuals in both public and private sectors. Especially in Costa Rica, this message appears in most of the tourist literature and promotional materials.

Spokespersons in Costa Rica believe that the country enjoys a highly positive international image among naturalists and biologists as the result of its special efforts to create national parks, biological reserves, and wildlife refuges covering samples of the major ecological systems. They also point to Costa Rica's role in television nature productions, and its identification internationally (especially in the U.S.) because of research and training at the Organization for Tropical Studies and at CATIE.

Ecuadorian tour operators maintain that the Galapagos Islands benefit from high-profile international recognition among persons interested in natural history, not requiring a great deal of organized publicity and promotion. Despite the many management problems yet to be resolved, the Galapagos Islands are regarded as one of the model national parks of Latin America.

However, the concern is that many prospective tourists to the Galapagos do not make the association (politically or geographically) with Ecuador, and do not have an image of continental Ecuador that includes its natural history.

Costa Rica.—Examples of specific natural history attractions in Costa Rica are the quetzals (Monteverde), sea turtles (Tortuguero and Sta. Rosa), active volcano (Poas), and variety of birds (Palo Verde). Other natural history tourists come for orchids, nature photography, and highly specific biological interests. Although individual tour operators may keep records of their clients' names and activities, a segmentation of tourists by type of natural history activity does not exist at the national level. One tourist operator believes that bird watchers are the most numerous natural-history visitors, but does not have data to support this contention.

Ecuador.—The natural history of the Galapagos Islands features their unique flora and fauna in the context of biological evolution. Cotopaxi is the world's highest active volcano, and tourist activities (by internationals) in Cotopaxi National Park seems to be mainly hiking and mountain trekking. (Current tourist activities in Cotopaxi apparently are at least as much "adventure" tourism as natural history tourism.) Similarly, the tour operators' trips to Amazonia are billed as adventure tours ("jungle expeditions"), combining mainly "soft" natural history with opportunities to experience Indian culture.

4. Rationale for Encouraging Nature-Oriented Tourism

In Costa Rica nature-oriented visits are desribed as "a small but increasing part of all tourism in Costa Rica." Inadequate data make it impossible to quantify numbers or trends, but one individual in the travel business offers a guesstimate that Costa Rica draws eight thousand nature-oriented tourists per year. Another guesses thirty thousand! Guesses of this sort call attention to the problems of defining a nature-oriented tourist, and to the desirability of having a reliable data base to make the analysis (see # 8 about data and statistics). A similar statement applies for Ecuador.

Spokespersons in Costa Rica and Ecuador identify a number of reasons why nature-oriented tourism should be encouraged in their countries. They contend that it is a subjectively "healthy" kind of tourism, attracting "desirable" types of visitors. They also maintain that nature-oriented tourism directs economic activity to remote communities, not concentrating all the spending in the large cities. Thirdly, it is argued that certain dedicated types of nature-oriented tourism are more tolerant of primitive facilities and infrastructure (i.e., bad roads, inferior lodging, etc.) than are other forms of tourism. Thus, the volume of nature-oriented tourism can increase immediately without necessarily depending upon expensive capital improvements (at least, in the short run). A fourth factor is the assumption that

natural history tourists may remain in the country for more days than visitors who come for other forms of tourism.

Fifthly, although both Costa Rica and Ecuador have lovely beaches, no big and modern beach hotels have developed through the present time. Because of expensive international air fares to Costa Rica and Ecuador, and because of the present small scale of beach tourism, tour operators in both countries doubt that they can effectively compete for the "fun-and-sun" tourist against competitors like Hawaii, Mexico, Jamaica, etc. In comparison, they view the true natural history tourist as belonging to a market which is relatively price-inelastic. That is, he/she attaches more subjective importance to experiencing the particular destination than to the cost of the trip.

All of the preceding statements are to be regarded as no more than casual hypotheses which need further definition and testing. They represent personal opinions of some of the persons most closely connected with nature-oriented travel, and contain understandable biases favorable to that segment.

5. Structure of the Supplier Firms (Tour Operators)

In each of Costa Rica and Ecuador, nature-oriented tourism is dominated by a single firm among a handful of firms. In Costa Rica the dominant firm is Costa Rica Expeditions (Michael Kaye, President). In Ecuador the dominant firm is Metropolitan Touring (Mariano Proano, Tourism Department Manager). While data are not available to determine market shares, Costa Rica Expeditions and Metropolitan Touring each probably account for well over half of all nature-oriented tourism in their respective countries. However, for both firms nature-oriented tourism is just one component of total sales. Costa Rica Expeditions began in 1978 on the basis of adventure tourism in whitewater rafting, while Metropolitan Touring has grown to a large operation (handling much of the Galapagos business) from its beginnings in the 1950s.

Some of the other firms identified with nature-oriented tourism are:

Costa Rica	Ecuador
GeoTur	EtnoTur
Horizontes	Neuvo Mundo
Interviajes	
Tikal	

Additionally, a few firms work from mainly outside of the destination countries. In principle, Costa Rican law prevents outside operators from conducting tours in the country without a Costa Rican associate, but this restriction is reportedly circumvented in a variety of ways.

With the exception of Metropolitan Touring which has its own offices abroad, the tour operators work with marketing wholesalers in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere to fill their tour packages. The tours are commonly sold at a net price, with the wholesalers adding their own mark-up. A familiar complaint in Costa Rica is that this mark-up is too high.

The tour operators claim that the vast majority of their business comes through pre-packaged tours. Yet the hotels in Costa Rica carry pamphlets and brochures to encourage hotel guests to sign up for short (e.g., one-day) nature excursions, using slogans like: "Tropical Forest Adventure, A Day with a Professional Naturalist" (Costa Rica Expeditions). Evidently the assumption is that the hotel guest either creates time to make this tour, or uses what otherwise would have been "free time" for it. Equivalent promotion with pamphlets in the hotels is not commonly observed in Ecuador.

6. Growth Opportunities in Nature-Oriented Tourism

Nature-oriented tourism in Costa Rica and Ecuador is still in its infancy. Most of the tour operators, and several of the conservation leaders, can readily itemize unexploited business opportunities that might have near-term potential. Their suggestions cover specific new tour routes, or specific new tourist services, which they think would be profitable.

In Costa Rica nature-oriented enterprise is experiencing a mini "boom." The tour operators mention the recent competition among themselves for the nature-oriented business. Nature orientation is relatively new for a number of them, and there is some question as to which of the new nature-oriented enterprises will survive and which will die. These next 2-3 years will probably see the emergence of a few additional firms, differential growth among the existing firms, adjustments in product lines, and other noticeable changes in industry composition.

7. Growth Constraints

Despite the potential indicated above, growth of nature-oriented tourism likely will be constrained at some point by relatively low social carrying capacity. The nature-oriented tourist may perceive crowding as a problem, not tolerating large groups of other nature-oriented tourists. If this generalization is true, it could limit growth possibilities much more quickly and severely than most tour operators presently acknowledge.

In addition to the issue of long-run carrying capacity for nature-oriented tourism, a number of other constraints affect the growth prospects of nature-based enterprise now and in the years

ahead. On the demand side the most frequently cited constraint is lack of marketing and promotion of tourism by the governments of Costa Rica and Ecuador. Spokespersons in the private sectors of both countries argue that their governments fail to recognize the economic role of tourism, and consequently do not budget nearly enough on tourism research and promotion in relation to the actual importance of the industry. Marketing and promotion will be discussed in #9.

On the supply side, the most frequently mentioned constraints are: (a) shortage of infrastructure and facilities in and near the national parks to accomodate visitors, (b) shortage of park service personnel and park management plans, (c) shortage of capable and experienced guides for nature-oriented tourism, and (d) inadequate protection of the tourist in terms of quality of experience, price level, and personal safety. Interestingly, these same constraints arise in both countries, with only slight variations in emphasis and context. Each constraint will be addressed in turn.

Infrastructure and Facilities.—This refers to the mix of public and private roads; internal air transport; and hotels, restaurants, and bathrooms. The wide range in price and quality of facilities in San Jose, Quito, and Guayaquil largely disappears in the rural areas of greatest importance for nature-oriented tourism. A few sites can be served directly from these major cities, which is one of the advantages of small countries. However, in both Costa Rica and Ecuador most tour operators stress the need to increase the number and standards of accomodations in the provinces—and increase the accessibility to them. This is particularly important for the "soft" variety of natural history tourism, which is thought by many tour operators to be the largest part of the market.

Also largely missing are infrastructure and facilities at the national parks and other natural history destinations. This includes visitor centers and interpretive materials, roads and trails, maps and signs, eating establishments, artisan shops, places for camping and picnics, and other developments in or near the national parks and other destination attractions. Only Poas (Costa Rica) and Galapagos (Ecuador) possess park infrastructure, although Cotopaxi (Ecuador) is said to have made substantial progress in the last 1-2 years. Even with respect to the three parks noted here, tour operators claim that there is vast scope for improvement.

Park Service Personnel and Park Management.—The relatively large system of parks, reserves, and refuges in Costa Rica is maintained on a budget of no more than about US$1 million per year. Furthermore, from the early 1970s through the present most effort and funding have been directed to land acquisition, not development. It is only now that—if the government's grave fiscal problems can be lessened—the Park Service (with the assistance of the National Parks Foundation) is ready to give more emphasis to parks protection, management, and development.

The tour operators contend that the parks need many more personnel (including park guides), roads and trails to get into the key areas, and a plan for park concessions and nearby services. Until recently, the Park Service has resisted the idea that the parks should be opened for tourists—or at least this is the perception of key individuals in the private sector.

In Ecuador international visitors to the Galapagos are charged US$40 or equivalent as an entrance fee (the fee is much less for Ecuadorian nationals). A part of this revenue stays with the Galapagos Park for its management and protection, while the rest is directed to other parts of the park system. Thus the considerable amount of revenue raised in the Galapagos can be used for park development elsewhere (e.g., at Cotopaxi). But through the present, none of Ecuador's national parks besides these two is favored with an operational management plan and supporting resources.

In Ecuador, a number of persons indicate that the first priority is simply parks protection. The long-run viability of natural history tourism depends on saving critical parts of the wildlands resource. Yet several sites which would have been suitable for nature-oriented tourism have been ruined by dynamite fishing, poaching and overhunting, encroachment by forest squatters, etc. Especially in Amazonia, certain national parks (e.g., Yasuni) and other areas of importance for nature preservation are being overrun with petroleum exploration, clearing for oil palm, and other forms of land development in disorganized and uncontrolled fashion. Even the Galapagos Islands have a number of problems with land-use conflicts.

In Costa Rica the protection issue is paramount, too, as exemplified by the recent serious problem with gold miners in Corcovado National Park. Concern is also raised with respect to protecting areas such as Braulio Carrillo National Park, particularly when the road from San Jose is completed. A number of other protection problems can be itemized.

Tour Guides.—At the level of an individual tour enterprise, the availability and quality of tour guides is perhaps the single most important factor determining the success or failure of nature-oriented tourism. This view was expressed several times in both countries. The guide needs a very thorough training in natural history, needs to be at least bilingual, and needs to be competent in people management and interpersonal communications.

According to Costa Rica Expeditions, perhaps only a dozen Costa Ricans truly meet these qualifications. Of that small number, most are not available to become tour guides because of other positions.

In Ecuador the Galapagos guides are reportedly highly specialized and very capable. The Charles Darwin Foundation provides training each year. Yet guides for the rest of the country are few. Some of the tourist hotels in Amazonia depend

on local Indian guides, but these guides are given no formal training. The scarcity of qualified guides in Ecuador is such that Metropolitan Touring employs a full-time recruiter in London.

Given this scarcity of qualified natural history guides, some of the tour operators (in Costa Rica) hire biology students and professors to work part-time or on a free-lance basis. Some of these part-time guides work for two or more tour operators, depending upon when and how tours are scheduled. Daily earnings are high, but turnover is also high, according to the tour operators. Many of those who become skilled guides quit and turn to alternative occupations. Also, some of the tour operators claim that many of the free-lance guides are not capable, provide a negative experience for the tourists, and do the tourism business a great deal of harm in the long run.

Protection of the Tourist.—Just as the long-run viability of nature-oriented tourism depends on protecting the wildlands, it also depends on protecting the tourists. Quality of tour guides has been discussed previously. In Ecuador, tourists to the Amazon reportedly are often "hassled" at military checkpoints. Among other concerns are price gouging, overselling the product in the originating country, and failure to insure personal safety.

A number of individuals in Ecuador mentioned the wide range of prices and qualities of services in natural history tourism, especially for the Galapagos. Apparently many tourists are exploited (inflated prices, inferior services) by some of the less reputable tour operators, and there is little policing of the industry. This is an obvious threat to the long-run welfare of the respectable, established firms.

Secondly, a number of tour operators and conservation leaders stress that natural history tourists should not be lured from the U.S. or Europe on the basis of exaggerated claims about the destination. The national parks of Costa Rica and Ecuador are not necessarily equivalent in purpose or grandeur with Yellowstone or Yosemite, and should not be advertised as such.

A third dimension of tourist protection concerns personal safety. For example, Cahuita National Park in Costa Rica reportedly has had problems with visitors being molested. Another part of safety is emergency medical attention in case of accidents or serious sickness. Costa Rica Expeditions provides its personnel with formalized training in emergency procedures, but such training is less likely to be found among certain of the smaller operators.

8. Statistics and Data Base

The quantity and quality of tourism statistics leave much to be desired with respect to their use for planning, promotion, marketing, and other purposes. In Costa Rica the official statistics are provided by the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT); in Ecuador by the Direccion Nacional de Turismo (DITURIS).

From the standpoint of being useful for natural history tourism, the national statistics are few; highly generalized; and often subject to interpretive questions because of vague definitions and methodology. The recent implementation of ICT's Encuesta Aerea Permanente answers many important questions about visitors from the U.S. and Canada, but neglects a category for natural history among the reasons why tourists come to Costa Rica for pleasure (choices offered: climate, beaches, low cost, sporting attractions, democracy, other _____).

In both Costa Rica and Ecuador the larger tour operators possess basic descriptive data about their clients, e.g., name, nationality, sex, age, and profession. These data are, of course, not necessarily available for public use. Additionally, a few special studies have attempted to construct profiles of natural history visitors. Among them are a report by Thomas J. Wood, "Costa Rica's Tourism Delivery System: A System Analysis," University of Minnesota at Duluth, April 1984. Another profile of natural history tourists in Costa Rica appears in the study "Desarrollo Turistico: Canales de Tortuguero," by Edaw, Inc. and Esquivel-Iglesias, S.A., May 1985. However, the quantity and quality of statistical support for the profiles needs investigation.

At present the National Parks Foundation of Costa Rica is providing modest support for an analysis of the economic impact of natural history tourism on the Costa Rican economy. The study is intended to furnish an estimate of the number of nature-oriented tourists entering the country, their average expenditures, views of the tour operators, and profiles of the tourists. The work is being conducted by Juan Bautista Chavarria, University of Costa Rica, and will bring together data and data interpretations from various sources. A total of approximately 100 visitors at 4-5 of the national parks are being interviewed. Basic field work is near completion.

9. Marketing and Promotion

A widely shared opinion in Costa Rica and Ecuador is that tourism marketing and promotion need much greater emphasis. These two small countries either have no image or a negative image in much of the U.S. and Europe. Costa Rica is associated with the war zones of Central America, while many persons in the U.S. have not heard of Ecuador and have difficulty spelling the name of the country. While nature-oriented tourists generally

have a high level of education, they are not always as well informed about world geography and politics as they should be. At least, these are views of tourist-based businesses in the two countries.

ICT's budget for promotion is less than US$2 million per year; the promotional budget for DITURIS is less than US$45 thousand. These budgets are small, even though conservation leaders and private sector spokespersons in both countries claim that tourism is among the top three or four sectors with respect to income and employment.

Costa Rica.—ICT is oriented mainly towards the U.S., with small offices (two promoters, one secretary) in Miami and Los Angeles. Florida and California are the principal tourist targets, as well as the main origins of tourism from outside of the region. (A substantial number of Panamanians enter Costa Rica from the south, and in earlier years many Nicaraguan tourists entered from the north.)

There has been some discussion as to whether Costa Rica should try to attract more Europeans (both KLM and Iberia serve San Jose). Opponents argue that ICT's small budget for promotion is spent more effectively by concentrating on the very large market in the U.S., and that efforts to promote Costa Rica in Europe are merely a distraction. Moreover, individuals in the private sector argue that ICT should pay less attention to market geography and more attention to market segments (e.g., focusing separately on strategies to attract naturalists, fishermen, retirees, convention trade, and so on).

Ecuador.—Ecuador draws relatively more tourists from Europe than does Costa Rica, and Quito is served by Lufthansa and Air France. Hotel Anaconda in Amazonia reports more European guests than American guests. Firms like Metropolitan Touring and EtnoTur seem to have close links with Europe. Ecuador also receives a large volume of tourists from Colombia.

National and Regional Markets.—The Colombian tourists in Ecuador presumably occupy a niche similar to the Panamanian tourists in Costa Rica. Among the tour operators interviewed, national and regional tourism are generally discounted as a source of natural history tourism. However, this assumption merits testing. For example, clients of the tour operator Interviajes are mainly Costa Ricans, not internationals.

Promotion by the Airlines.--None of LACSA, Eastern, or Ecuatoriana reports using natural history as a theme for country promotion. Some time ago one edition of LACSA's in-flight magazine carried a feature on Costa Rica's national parks. Also, some coverage of the Galapagos and other regions of importance to natural history is almost inevitable among the articles written about Ecuador.

However, none of the airlines currently employs a deliberate strategy to concentrate on natural history as a focal point for promotion. The marketing managers seem to perceive that segment of the market as too small, and the theme too narrow, to be of promotional value. Yet the airlines do participate indirectly in natural history promotion, as in arrangements in Costa Rica to share the costs of promotional brochures with ICT and with private tour operators.

Tours for Journalists and Travel Agents.--The airlines, hotels, tour operators, and government tourist authorities combine efforts to invite travel writers and travel agents from the U.S. and elsewhere to make familiarization tours ("fam tours") of their countries. Some of the tour operators report that these could be improved for the benefit of natural history tourism. For example, one fam tour in Costa Rica was criticized for not including a single national park in the tour. But when the fam tours work "right," they are said to provide a very positive result at little cost.

One individual suggested that more U.S. TV coverage and journal coverage would be given natural history if only special "events" were captured and given wide notice. For example, 65 NBC stations bought a one-hour TV special on the signing of a document to protect the Pacuare River in Costa Rica. The filming cost only US$10 thousand, and is expected to generate a highly positive exposure for Costa Rica.

Marketing and Promotion by Individual Firms.--The larger tour operators participate in trade fairs like El Mercado, Las Americas (Miami), and ITB (Berlin). These trade fairs are their main source of contacts with the international marketers. It is not certain how many of the smaller operators also participate in trade fairs.

Firms in both countries commented on advertising in U.S. nature magazines like Smithsonian, Audubon, Natural History, etc. This is perceived as expensive, and not widely practiced at present. Some of the firms in Costa Rica hope to establish close ties with professional associations and/or nature organizations like the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, National Wildlife Association, etc. One small firm had sent a representative directly to the U.S. to personally try to win Audubon business. Another is anticpating that the 1988 meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) will be held in Costa Rica, bringing a large number of journalists, visitors, and a budget of over US$300 thousand to the country.

One firm recognizes four distinct components in the natural history market, and adopts a different marketing strategy for each component. The first component--half of the firm's clientele--appreciates natural history without specializing in it. In this group is the medical doctor who likes orchids and photography, for instance. The second component is the highly specialized clientele interested solely in birds, solely in

butterflies, etc. The third component consists of student groups, mainly at the (advanced) university level. The fourth component consists of nature clubs and associations. Each component is reached through different marketing contacts, and each implies different arrangements for tours and other services.

10. Relations Between Private and Public Sectors

Each of Costa Rica and Ecuador has a tourist incentives law which grants duty exemptions and accelerated depreciation on imported vehicles, computers, etc., used by hotels, tour operators, and other tourist businesses. Individuals in the private sector feel that these incentives have been modestly to highly successful, although many would like to see coverage broadened (e.g., to small planes, boats, etc.).

In neither country is there competition between the public sector and private sector for tourism business. Almost all enterprise is confined to the private sector, although DITURIS once had attempted (apparently unsuccessfully) ownership and management of one or more tourist resorts.

In neither Costa Rica nor Ecuador does there appear to be a strong working relationship between the government and the private sector in the tourist industry. Cooperation between private and public entities can be seen in activities like fam tours and cost-sharing of promotional brochures, especially in Costa Rica. However, public expenditures in these projects are very modest. Moreover, the national parks services evidently are not working collaboratively with the tourist authorities in ICT or DITURIS, nor are the parks services working formally with tour operators and others in the private sector. In Ecuador the national airline Ecuatoriana does not participate in any joint projects with DITURIS. In both countries informal ties and friendships among individuals surely exist, but the main organizations of importance for nature-oriented tourism are not tied together in programmatic ways.

APPENDIX A — CONTACTS IN COSTA RICA

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Gerardo Budowski, Former Head, Natural Renewable Resources Department, CATIE, Turrialba.

Tamara Budowski, Gerente de Ventas, Horizontes, San Jose.

Rebecca Butterfield, Organization for Tropical Studies, San Jose.

Adrian Camacho, Gerente General, Hotel Balmoral, San Jose. Presidente ACHA (hotels association).

Juan Bta. Chavarria, Escuela de Estadistica, Universidad de Costa Rica, San Jose.

Daniel Janzen, Department of Biology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Humberto Estrada, Director de Mercadeo, Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, San Jose.

Carlos Golcher, Gerente de Ventas, Eastern Airlines, San Jose.

Rex Govorchin, PCI Special Interest Tourism Development, Miami, Florida.

Gary and Lynn Hartshorn, Tropical Science Center, San Jose.

Michael Kaye, President, Costa Rica Expeditions, San Jose.

T. James Lewis, Vice-President, Costa Rica Expeditions, San Jose.

Carlos Lizama, Presidente, ACOPROT (association of travel professionals), San Jose.

Rolando Mendoza, Educacion Ambiental, Universidad Nacional Autonoma, Heredia.

Juan Jose Mora, Gerente Promocion y Publicidad, LACSA, San Jose.

David Reid, Owner and Manager, Calypso Tours, San Jose.

Luis Fernando Reynolds, Director, Viajes Ultramerica, San Jose.

Bary Roberts, Presidente, Camara Nacional de Turismo (CANATUR), San Jose.

Charles Schnell, Resident Director, Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), San Jose.

Enrique Torrent, Vice-Presidente Alimentos y Bebidas, Hotel Sheraton Herradura, San Jose. Presidente CACORE (restaurants association).

Sergio Volio, Gerente Turismo Receptivo, GeoTur, San Jose.

APPENDIX B — CONTACTS IN ECUADOR

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Alejandro Duenas, Subdirector, Direccion Nacional de Turismo, Quito.

Jorge Hurtado, Gerente General, Hotel Anaconda, Rio Napo.

Yolanda Kakabadse, Directora Ejecutiva, Fundacion Natura, Quito.

Arturo Ponce, Jefe del Departamento de Areas Naturales y Vida Silvestre, Ministerio de Agricultura, Quito.

Mariano Proano, Tourism Department Manager, Metropolitan Touring, Quito.

Roque Sevilla, Gerente General, Tecniseguros (and formerly, Director, Direccion de Desarrollo Forestal), Quito.