



# 2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title:** Loving Bacalar, Heroes co-creating consciousness

**Destination, Country:** Bacalar, México

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**In the category:**  Destination Management  Environment & Climate  Thriving Communities  
 Nature & Scenery  Culture & Tradition  Business & Marketing

**The Story in a picture:**

Heroes with a clear commitment to elevate practices and reach the generation of public policy that manages to shield this magical lagoon and its surrounding ecosystem, including a healthy, fulfilled and radiant social ecosystem, inclusive of its urban and rural sectors, where the treasures of the living Mayan culture are ready to be discovered.



**Summary:**

The Mexican Caribbean, on the Quintana Roo state coast, has been for more than 5 decades, THE MASSIVE TOURISM HUB OF LATIN AMERICA. Currently, Quintana Roo is turning its history around, and is seriously searching for mechanisms to diminish the social, economic and psychological gaps between its residents, therefore creating the conditions for a shared prosperity. Today, Bacalar, in the south of the state, is at a critical turning point in its history: finding a balance between tourism activity and the fragile health of its lagoon ecosystem.





## 2023 TOP 100

### GOOD PRACTICE STORY

The lagoon ecosystem of that MAGICAL SEVEN-COLORED LAGOON [as it is internationally known], has a social ecosystem of vibrant citizens, businessmen and authorities with a great commitment to the common good and a shared vision:

To RECOVER THE BIO-PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL CONDITION of the water and with it, to create a citizen network of LONG-TERM CARE, through the activation of individual consciousness through science, gastronomy and art. All of them, in the search of the ecosystemic balance that allows a SUSTAINABLE development in time and space, in the lagoon and in all the surrounding ecosystem that impacts it, with an aware population and an inclusive and educated tourism about the fragility of the site, both, active in the solutions for the long-term enjoyment of this and future generations in this magical lagoon...

The weaving created by this conscious community, working on different components of the lagoon ecosystem, in this case water, urban management and tourism, all ultimately related to the health of the lagoon's water, creates a widespread consciousness that is contagious for the common good.

Being the second year of participation in the TOP100 Competition, Bacalar actively responds and the heroes who answer the call are three organizations/companies with a clear commitment to elevate practices and reach the generation of public policy that manages to shield this magical lagoon and its surrounding ecosystem, including a healthy, full and radiant social ecosystem, inclusive of its urban and rural sectors, where the treasures of the living Mayan culture are ready to be discovered.

Heroes of the Bacalar Lagoon Ecosystem located in 2023:

- a. Agua Clara Ciudadanos por Bacalar, A.C., permanent citizen monitoring of water quality and the generation of an early warning traffic light.
- b. Nixtamal, conscious gastronomy, a gastronomic experience that includes a tour to each customer, by the most outstanding areas of their good practices with the intention of triggering awareness of the fragile lagoon system, and the exhaustive care that visitors and residents should have.
- c. RaízAudiovisual, an artistic lens that documents, socializes, makes visible and links diverse actions of social stakeholders for a more sustainable urban management.



## Good Practice Story:

### Destination description

*Brief background of the destination.*

Bacalar is an emerging destination in the southern part of the Mexican Caribbean, undoubtedly the southern destination with the greatest projection and growth potential in the coming years. Bacalar is the oldest urban center in the state of Quintana Roo, founded between the years 415 to 435 A.D., by a Mayan group called Chanés (descendants of the Chontal Maya) with the name of Sian Ka'an Bakhahal, Sian Ka'an translates as "where the sky is born" and Bak halal means "surrounded by reeds".

It is a thriving small community, with about 12,500 inhabitants and head of many other rural or semi-rural communities located in its surroundings and nearby.

"The Bacalar Lagoon or Seven Colors Lagoon has that name because the different depths of its soil in conjunction with the variation of the sun's rays, reflect on its surface seven shades of blue, which gives it a wonderful touch, inspiring, relaxing and in tune with the surrounding nature.

It is a shallow, circular, elongated lagoon; it is 42 kilometers long and four kilometers wide, at its widest point, in its interior there are three cenotes that "overflowed" and gave rise to this lagoon". <https://culturacolectiva.com/viajes/laguna-de-bacalar-como-llegar-que-hacer-costos/>

"One of the most impressive attractions of the Bacalar lagoon, besides its beautiful colors, are the rock formations found in its crystal clear waters, which date back millions of years and are an essential part of our planet, we are talking about the stromatolites.

The Bacalar Lagoon or also known as the Seven Colors Lagoon, is the largest body of fresh surface water that exists in the Yucatan Peninsula, but also houses one of the largest stromatolite reefs in the world, with more than 10,000 years of formation.

In addition to Quintana Roo, Coahuila and Puebla are also home to these mineral structures built by cyanobacteria, important oxygen producers.

Stromatolites can be seen in much of the lagoon body of Bacalar and resemble large rocks, but these are very sensitive, so touching them, standing on them or sitting on them can damage or even kill them." <https://descubro.mx/los-estromatolitos-de-bacalar-las-espectaculares-rocas-vivientes/>

### Issues faced

*Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.*

Bacalar is a community currently dedicated to tourism as a leading activity, which is developed between the Seven Colors Lagoon, its jungle coastline, archaeological sites, small communities full of living culture and the nearby city of Chetumal, capital city of the state of Quintana Roo.

Its status as an emerging destination in Quintana Roo's Grand Tourism ecosystem places it in a fragile defining situation. It is a key moment in history that will define its future, because while businessmen, authorities and local people organize coordinated activities and plan public policies for its preservation, economic and development pressures threaten its natural and social environment, as unique as it is vulnerable.

Since 2005, Bacalar has multiplied the number of annual tourists by up to 750%, which is a challenge for society and authorities to shape a new destination that clearly wants to correct the mistakes of the north of the state. Thus, society and authorities, local leaders and businessmen, are creating

platforms of scientific information and specific actions that add up in the scenario towards the creation of a regulatory framework, based on scientific information, with measurements of local KPI's, such as water and waste, management of urban areas, integration of suburban areas, integrated with care and love, by citizens who link and socialize, who carry out awareness projections to every corner of Bacalar, communicating, raising awareness and offering valuable information to take informed decisions to all those involved.

Since the water quality of The Lagoon is the fundamental axis from which everything stems, also, to which everything converges, the stakeholders of the community, interweave with "science". (In spanish Conciencia which spells Con & Ciencia, which means With Science) Monitoring the water quality of the lagoon, with citizen participation, from teachers to children in primary education, generating a warning light for the entire population and visitors; sharing good practices from the tourism service providers, a gastronomic experience in this case, with each customer to raise awareness about the fragility of the ecosystem they visit; and an artistic eye guided by love, which locates these initiatives that are building with "science" in Bacalar, and need to be socialized.

### Methods, steps, and tools applied

*Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.*

Guided by the love for Bacalar... three heroes who put their love into action:

#### SCIENTIFIC MONITORING OF WATER QUALITY.

<https://www.aguaclara-por-bacalar.org/>

AGUA CLARA, CIUDADANOS POR BACALAR, A.C., is an NGO dedicated since 2016 to permanent citizen monitoring the water quality, which promotes the understanding of the environment by the resident and makes it available to the local community and the world, an alert light indicator in which the readings of its measurements in about 27 points of the lagoon on sensitive indicators of biochemical and physical health of the water are made known. Melina, its executive director, is a woman committed to the welfare of the Lagoon and convinced that water quality monitoring in Bacalar strengthens social bonds, networks of care and knowledge in the community, promotes environmental education, empowers the community around the appropriation of the territory, conservation and sustainability of the ecosystem, environmental and social, including students, entrepreneurs and society in general based on a strategy of citizen science. Additionally, this institution conducts environmental education workshops, promoting water care, citizen science, preservation of wetlands and mangroves, and urban solid waste management with the implementation of the first pilot waste station located in Bacalar, to socialize the recycling and revaluation of waste. Melina promotes among its participants the great opportunities for community-based tourism that nearby sites offer and can lighten the concentrated load of the tourist seasons on the lagoon ecosystem.

#### NIXTAMAL.

CONSCIOUS COOKING THROUGH FIRE AND ASHES.

<https://www.instagram.com/nixtamalcocinaafuegoyceniza/?hl=es>

Rodrigo Estrada, founder of Nixtamal and passionate about gastronomy as a way of contact with nature and its power, considers it essential to include as part of the visit to the site, a tour in which the visitor internalizes the importance of caring for the environment, the fragility of the site they visit and the cult of ancestral Mayan culture, as an inherent part of the dining experience, by highlighting its good sustainable practices, from honoring the local culture with "houses of the ALUXES" to ask for good fortune to the guardians of the site, a fire that is not extinguished, by consuming wood from fallen trees, the super recycling of glass, organic compost, artisan production of coconut oil, organic vegetable garden, among others... and its wonderful bioclimatic architecture



that has respected the large monumental trees to preserve an enviable microclimate inside Nixtamal.

RAÍZ AUDIOVISUAL

DIFFUSION AND AWARENESS.

<https://www.youtube.com/@raizaudiovisual1421/featured>

Jorge Luis Villarreal has put his lens and creativity to document and socialize the various initiatives and actions that promote environmental education, the reduction of the use of plastics, recycling, as well as traditions, festivities and cultural events that take place in this vital community, making them known through various media, networks and awareness projections, at the same time that a video archive is being developed that serves as a historical document and collective memory of Bacalar.

The three components live loving Bacalar and weave a story in which visitors and residents converge at different points of their walk through Bacalar, to co-create with science, art and gastronomy, a more sustainable future for the Magical Lagoon of Bacalar.

### Key success factors

*Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.*

The challenge of preserving Bacalar's pristine and crystalline magical lagoon, its natural and social ecosystem, and integrating the surrounding communities into its prosperity, is a goal that requires these and more heroes. The strong impact of these three chapters on the collective consciousness is an engine that puts love into action.

Once again, TOP100 Competition is the perfect excuse to link the collectivity that in isolation was walking towards the same goal. The process of detecting local heroes in TOP100 exalts, links, strengthens and socializes the active values of a community that lives LOVING BACALAR, and thus, strengthened, seeks a direct impact on public policies that are committed to PRESERVE THE NATURAL TREASURE OF THE MAGICAL LAGOON AND ITS ANCESTRAL STROMATOLITES, as well as the entire ecosystem that today lives a life based on its magnificence.

Science based on citizen participation, the sensitization of collaborators and consumers as well as the creation of records of awareness in Bacalar, are key elements to take firm steps towards a society that will lay the foundations of a public policy that will define a sustainable future for Bacalar, from a present that is busy measuring to improve, linking to act and recording so as not to forget.

### Lessons learned

*Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.*

The stories that answer the call of the year2 TOP100 Competition are powerful engines of change in a society under construction. They are citizens committed to writing a new history, determined to co-create from the present towards a future that can be sustained for all, fundamentally and importantly, the natural, cultural and social treasures.

The great challenge of Bacalar's society is to VISIBILIZE their actions, to unite their results, to be agents of change IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING of the present and future of Bacalar.

On the side of "Agua Clara Ciudadanos por Bacalar", it highlights the importance of resolution and persistence in the face of difficulties in obtaining results. The involvement of the community in the periodic monitoring of the water quality of the Bacalar lagoon, through a citizen science strategy, has implied an important economic and management effort, both for the technical specialization

and the type of laboratory materials required, and for the human effort that has meant the linkage, promotion, training and collaboration with academic, public administration, education and civil society instances as a whole.

The path of "Nixtamal" also leaves remarkable lessons about the introjection of Mayan culture and sensibility in the way of appreciating and valuing nature, its mysticism and its meaning in daily life, as well as the introduction of traditional recipes and ingredients of traditional knowledge in their menu.

Raíz Audiovisual" highlights the large number of initiatives and actions detected, it is a light of hope, because it shows a community made up of concerned and busy stakeholders... Raíz Audiovisual is writing the history of change agents... in order not to forget the present moment and the lessons learned, to face the challenges with knowledge and action.

### Achievements and Results

*Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.*

The three stories of heroes who co-create with-consciousness, are a vital part of a positively active community to CLEARLY SET THE BASIS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE, DIFFERENTIATED AND INFORMED FUTURE... both residents and visitors, and this adds up as puzzle pieces, with our TOP100 2022 Year 1 story, with a practical example of a low environmental impact & high consciousness impact.

#### PARTICIPATIVE-SCIENTIFIC MONITORING OF WATER QUALITY IN THE LAGOON:

- Monthly monitoring and publication of the water quality indicator light for the presence of Escherichia coli from 2019 to current date (between 7 and up to 23 established sites).
- Publication of Bacalar Lagoon Report Card
- Publication of the Participative Water Quality Monitoring Guide
- Brochure and infographics supporting the Participative Water Quality Monitoring Guide
- Installation of the Recyclable Solid Waste Pilot Station
- Establishment of the Bacalar Lagoon Water Quality Monitoring Network.
- 24 water quality monitoring activities carried out with the support of members of the Participative Monitoring Network
- 26 monitoring points identified along the 60 km of Bacalar Lagoon
- 16 parameters analyzed by the monitoring network
- 24 people trained in taking and analyzing water samples
- 12 people trained in the use and maintenance of sampling equipment
- 3 monitoring activities carried out by certified laboratory at 6 strategic points in Bacalar lagoon
- 71 infographics on the meaning of water quality monitoring and the parameters for analysis
- Promotion of collaboration and dissemination of information to other institutions and the general public
- Training of groups of skilled monitors on participative monitoring and surveillance of water and mangrove areas
- Acceptance of the importance of citizen participation in the generation of data and permanent monitoring as a tool in the appropriation of information and care of the environment
- Transparency of information is guaranteed, a healthy place of access to recreation for tourists and residents
- Creation of a water quality indicator, a results platform open to the public
- Creation of a communication campaign on water quality parameters
- Creation of a group of kids mangrove messengers with the participation of nautical service providers and children

NIXTAMAL. CONSCIOUS CUISINE that leaves its mark:

- 100 thousand trips = 100k people with a seed sown for the care of the planet and the return to ancestral wisdoms.
- 20 tons of compost = 20 tons NOT DELIVERED TO THE LANDFILL that will not generate any leachate.
- 16 tons of recycled glass = 16 tons REUSED ON SITE
- 5 thousand glasses produced = REVALUATION of glass materials
- 1500 wooden plates produced = REVALUATION and AVOIDANCE of risks of fallen wood - previously considered unusable - which can also start forest fires.

RAÍZ AUDIOVISUAL. AUDIOVISUAL ROOTS. DIFFUSION AND AWARENESS. Leaving a record, sowing awareness... so as not to forget!

- Creation of a local and self-managed media that gives voice and diffusion to all local good practices
- 11 short documentaries on environmental projects, natural beauty, art and culture of Bacalar
- Photographic archive of more than 500 photos about Bacalar and its community
- 8 community screenings in the town of Bacalar in various locations, with diverse audiences

### Tips for other destinations

*Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions*

The demands that are created in expanding tourist destinations are many and very diverse, fundamental values are at stake and the focus can be lost on a vital issue:

THE REASON FOR TOURIST DEMAND is ACTUALLY, THE NATURAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL that exists today.

Communicating, socializing, making visible and working in collaborative governance for SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC PLANNING based on reliable information is vital to give value to the efforts of committed citizens... which always exists in every place!

### Recognitions and Additional references

*Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.*

VIDEO STORY.

<https://youtu.be/4aSdmnw2EFI>