

GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Loving Playa del Carmen, The sacred nature's calling

Destination, Country: Playa del Carmen, México

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In the category: Nature & Scenery

The Story in a picture:

Playa del Carmen, magical place where wills and actions converge and are guided by a force... intuition that calls to protect and make a change. We witness the manifestation of a force: a feminine spirit that calls for the protection and care of this magical coastal ecosystem, in its four integrating elements:

- Sea
- Coastline
- Jungle
- Underground rivers, caves and cenotes



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Summary

Playa del Carmen, the heart of the Riviera Maya in the Mexican Caribbean, is a magical place where wills and actions converge and are guided by a force... intuition that calls to protect and make a change. In TOP100 Competition PLAYA DEL CARMEN Year 2, we witness the manifestation of a force: a feminine spirit that calls for the protection and care of this magical coastal ecosystem, in its four integrating elements:

- the sea
- the coast
- the jungleground

Under our feet, in the underground, different women feel the summoning: a synchronized heartbeat that silently weaves the network of consciousness. Impulses that are tuned to form a grandiose symphony.

The Mexican Caribbean, on the coast of the state of Quintana Roo, is turning its history around. It is seriously searching for mechanisms to diminish the social, economic, and psychological differentials among its population, creating conditions for shared prosperity. The challenge is to unite visions and wills, and to converge in a center of balance with benefits for all involved.

A story unfolds within each component of the Coastal Ecosystem (technically encompassing the sea up to 200m deep, the coastline, the jungle, and extending up to one hundred kilometers inland). In this landscape, the subterranean river system plays a vital role, serving as the source and sustainer of the water that nourishes the coastline. All 4 stories include women who have felt and followed the summoning of a unifying and transforming power. Discovering their stories, fills us with inspiration and amazement at the strength and change in the exercise of tourism in a Playa del Carmen nestled in the pulsating COASTAL ECOSYSTEM.

Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

Playa del Carmen is the heart of Mexico's Riviera Maya, the main tourist destination in all of Mexico and Latin America. It is a cosmopolitan destination, made up of a resident community of about 120 nationalities from all over the world, who have felt the call to make this enigmatic place, THEIR HOME.

"Playa" is a clear example of a different tourism model in the entire Mexican Caribbean region. It has free access to the beach for residents and visitors, a thriving cultural and commercial life in the city, open spaces for coexistence and exchange between tourists and locals, and ample offer and access to experiences of contact with local culture and nature.

Multiculturalism is undoubtedly one of the main attractions of this magical city; and from there, initiatives arise that move people's consciousness for a more sustainable "Playa".

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

For over two decades, Playa del Carmen has faced the enormous challenge of providing a home for the growing number of people from around the world who choose to make this Latin American city their home each year. Addressing housing demands while upholding values and consistency to preserve THE ORIGINAL MOTIVE of this substantial interest constitutes the annual challenge. That is where the spirits dedicated to the mission emerge: TO ATTEND THE SACRED CALL TO AWAKEN THE CONSCIOUSNESS TOWARDS CONSERVATION AND CARE, solving the mistakes of the past and laying the foundations for a new urban model on the Mexican Caribbean coast.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

Confronted with the apparent challenge of undertaking actions for the protection and preservation of the coastal ecosystem in Playa del Carmen, we witness the emergence of a force: a feminine spirit advocating for the safeguarding and nurturing of this enchanting coastal ecosystem. Whether from the sea, the coast, the land, or beneath our feet in the underground, various women heed the call—a synchronized heartbeat silently weaving the network of consciousness. Impulses harmonize to create a magnificent symphony.

IN THE SEA. A group of diving companies, led by women scientists from the company DIVE MIKE, is undertaking actions of self-regulation and collective organization. They organize a tourist activity based on the protection of bull sharks that have chosen the area, off the coast of Playa del Carmen, as a place to feed and give birth to their young.

This undertaking involves a community organization effort that requires careful management to gradually unite key stakeholders. These include diving companies, fishermen, local and national authorities, scientists, and experts. The goal is to establish agreements and regulations ensuring the responsible management of this activity while safeguarding the species from predation. Simultaneously, the initiative aims to regulate related tourism activities, benefiting numerous families and ensuring a sustainable future. This approach not only contributes to marine environmental health, given the species' crucial role in the area's ecological balance but also fosters economic and social benefits. By linking economic activity with scientific knowledge, the initiative strives to create a sanctuary, serving as a unique symbol of identity.

ON THE COAST. In the local public sphere, María de Lourdes Vázquez, Solidaridad's Secretary of Environment, spearheads an initiative to address the sargassum upwelling effectively. The approach involves the removal of tons of seaweed from the coast, transporting it to a remote area, and processing it for beneficial uses. Simultaneously, this process aims to recover the sand to enhance the coastline's health. The solution is straightforward: by preventing the sargassum from decomposing in contact with water, it is removed, dehydrated under sunlight in a designated area, and then pulverized. The dried seaweed can be repurposed as livestock feed or fuel. Meanwhile, the recovered sand is returned to the beaches, preventing erosion. This cost-effective solution not only contributes to the coastal ecosystem's health and beach recovery for both visitors and locals but also addresses an environmental problem that has significantly impacted the local economy and the ecological balance of the coastal area.

The strategic management of sargassum, led by "Lou" as she is affectionately called by her collaborators, for the recovery of clean sand, has created a much more functional and committed socio-natural system. This approach provides greater satisfaction to human needs in a healthy, clean and recovered environment.

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This Municipality has decided to START THE JOURNEY towards certification, submitting their registration in GTScan to set up the leadership and example among entrepreneurs, also to understand the way THEY CAN DELIVER "Green Stimulus Package" for companies that adhere to GTP. Municipality is currently working to study the Stimulus they can offer starting 2024, due to the minimizing of the demand of public services in companies adhered to GTP.

Also, a new strategy to collect PET in the beaches has been installed, with total success... BASKET PET made out of recycled materials, making recycling something fun, collecting over 4 tons of PET in just two days.

THE INTERNATIONAL BEACH MANAGEMENT AND CERTIFICATION TRAINING CENTER, with its Coastal Systems Research group, conducted a scientific analysis of 59 beaches in 10 Latin American countries, with 20 indicators in four domains: recreation, protection, conservation and sanitation. The visit was conducted in secret. Thus, the evaluation report and ranking of the best beaches in 2023, places Playa Esmeralda, in Playa del Carmen:

- 5th place in Latin American Beaches
- 4th place in Caribbean Beaches
- 3rd place in Urban Beaches
- And...
- 1st place in Mexico Beaches

Thus, a beach in Playa del Carmen, went from being one of the most polluted and poorly managed, to being ranked as the BEST BEACH IN MEXICO. A clear example of a committed, collaborative and innovative work in the face of the current challenges of our world.

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BEACH RANKING REPORT

IN THE JUNGLE. The civil society group, Movimiento Ciudadano Ecologista (MOCE Yax Cuxtal), led by women, and among them, Guadalupe de la Rosa and Laura Patiño, initiated an action program known as the "Museo Vivo de Árboles Nativos Antiguos Urbanos" (Living Museum of Urban Ancient Native Trees). The primary objective of this program is to conserve and recognize the importance of native trees in Playa del Carmen, emphasizing their environmental, social, cultural, and economic value. As part of their efforts, they established a tourist corridor around the monumental trees preserved in the urban area of Playa del Carmen. This initiative has successfully engaged the community in the care and preservation of the city's monumental trees, contributing significantly to the health of the coastal ecosystem. This is where their great contribution to the health of the coastal ecosystem is established.

CAVES AND CENOTES. The labor of Pia Simoneta Ramos, an enthusiastic young woman who has created the movement called "Women, Girls and Biodiversity", consists of environmental education activities and cleanups of caves, cenotes, beaches and seabed in Playa del Carmen. It is especially aimed at involving girls, teenagers and local women. The movement is a bridge for girls and teenagers to have a source of inspiration from extraordinary women who have fought for conservation in spite of adversity and to motivate them not to give up on their dreams of studying or pursuing a profession. Pía is an example of tenacity, she has conducted research of great scientific value. She has carried out a Risk Atlas of Citadine Bats in Playa del Carmen, as a fundamental element of biodiversity to maintain the balance in the health of the Coastal Ecosystem and an investigation of Invasive Species of Fish in Cenotes and Caverns. She has faced gender inequality, rejection due to her age... and these challenges have empowered her to continue and carry her voice and example further every day. Thus, she has achieved exposure spaces for her work in scenarios of great importance, such as COP15-UN. Pia is an inspiration and role model for girls from 5-6 years old, to women researchers in Mayan communities, who by cultural heritage, are denied a role in scientific research.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

Collective awareness of the risks of economic growth is the key element in this story, which moves actors from various sectors of the community to carry out environmental protection and education actions for the preservation and care of the coastal ecosystem.

The development of Playa del Carmen has been a phenomenon of great impact on the city. Many of the stakeholders in this story have witnessed the emergence of new housing areas, commercial service centers, with the consequent opening of streets, avenues and urban facilities.

Fortunately, concurrently with growth, there has been a rising collective awareness of the necessity to undertake actions for environmental and social protection and care across all sectors of society. This includes businesses, public administration, academia, and civil society.

Considering the array of initiatives outlined in this Green Destinations TOP100 story, a collective consciousness prevails in the Playa del Carmen community, urging action. This community is attuned to the risks associated with the outcomes of economic development, and it has committed to taking measures to safeguard the natural heritage. This commitment is rooted in the historical responsibility to transmit the beauty and magnificence that underpin all economic activities in the region to future generations.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

Beyond the lesson learned from the incredible call that is capable of generating awareness and responsibility for the preservation of the coastal ecosystem, in a group of women with great leadership in the community, there are several interesting lessons worth highlighting from each initiative:

OF THE SEA. It's noteworthy that this has been a complex and winding process, gradually organizing many diverse actors, each with their own interests and circumstances. The aim has been to form agreements and establish a foundation for collaboration, generating the necessary conditions for a self-regulation scheme that benefits all stakeholders.

Some of the most striking lessons are:

- The convenience of accepting the contributions to the common solution from the diverse circumstances and interests.
- Knowing how to appreciate the needs of fishermen and taking advantage of their love and great knowledge of the sea, as part of the solution and not the problem.
- The positive attitude of being willing to contribute resources and proposed solutions to the public authorities has yielded good results. The authorities welcomed the openness and collaboration of the companies, and as a result, today they work together with regulations on permits and load capacity, reached through agreement and dialogue with the stakeholders involved.

There are also interesting lessons regarding the role of academia and scientific research. Both have accompanied the process and today are key players in providing information to shape decision-making. Also, the drafting of standards and laws that model and protect this activity, in a virtuous and sustainable circle towards the future.

OF THE COAST LINE. The most important lesson is that many times the simplest solutions can be found with an important dose of creativity and innovation. Faced with the problem of sargassum, for which proposals were presented by various academic and business institutions, involved complex and costly processes for collection and final processing. A government team was able to address the problem with attitude and decision of service, applying knowledge based on simplified thinking and a deep understanding of the processes of nature. They recovered the beaches and solved a problem that seemed to have no solution, except for costly proposals. The solution has involved tireless dedicated work and the results have been EXCEPTIONAL. A beach that seemed "lost" has been ranked the BEST BEACH IN THE COUNTRY and ranked among the top 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

IN THE JUNGLE. The "Museo Vivo de Árboles Nativos Antiguos Urbanos," an initiative of MOCE Yax Cuxtal, underscores the lesson that activists learned from the impact of placing a distinctive plaque on the trees. The plaque contains information and reflections on the value and importance of the trees, and its effect on the community was significant.

The plaque has created an energetic space "as a shield of protection" in an effective involvement of society with the protected trees. This has made the community identify and treasure them as part of their own identity and their own capital and heritage, and defend them against attempts to cut them down or remove them from their place.

IN THE CAVES AND CENOTES. Pía shows how a young girl can change the sense of ownership of inhabitants and visitors, with evidence of "Ximena", Pía's student, only 6 years old, who has already participated in caving congresses. Social leaders like Pía are capable of changing the relationship of the population with their environmental surroundings, to change it from being taken as a "garbage dump" to becoming a place of love and respect by the residents.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

The search for stories that inspire gave us the opportunity to LISTEN TO THE SACRED CALL OF THE FOREST THAT ATTRACTS DIVERSE, POWERFUL AND INSPIRED WOMEN WHO WORK INANSABLY FOR THE COMMON GOOD. TOP100 Year 2 Playa del Carmen in the Platform that allows that call to be integrated IN A GREAT SYMPHONY to make visible to the world the unity that is the COASTAL ECOSYSTEM, NATURAL CAPITAL OF PLAYA DEL CARMEN.

IN THE SEA. GROUP OF DIVERS LED BY DETERMINED WOMEN.

- 30 businesses organised and regulated around the activity of bull shark watching
- Publication of official rules and regulations by the competent authority, based on standards of good practice and self-regulation of the companies involved
- Participation and involvement of key stakeholders: companies, fishermen, academia, and authorities
- Economic activity benefiting 150 families in the region
- Development of image recognition techniques and generation of information to increase knowledge on the behaviour of the species, for the benefit of economic activity and the preservation of the species
- Collective involvement in the management, regulation and modelling of a tourism activity with economic benefits for the community
- Community participation in the development of clear agreed laws and regulations governing carrying capacity, and protection and preservation of a threatened species
- Collaborative design with key stakeholders towards the possible declaration of a bull shark sanctuary in a protected area off the coast of Playa del Carmen
- MORE THAN 14 YEARS OF RECORDS OF SHARKS that have been repeatedly summoned by the same SACRED CALL to give continuity to the life of their species, and have found women who, without hesitation, have found a way of healthy coexistence with them, to be saved from being hunted by fishermen whose previous job was to sell their meat, today, they are transformed into guides for tourists who love the proximity to "Las Tiburonas"

ON THE COAST. MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY.

- 37,496 tons of sargassum collected in 2022.
- Rehabilitation of 21 beaches with public access (Playa Paraíso, Xcalacoco, Punta Esmeralda, Playa 88, Playa 72, Playa Pelicanos, Playa Shangri La, Playa Constituyentes, Playa el Recodo, Playa Calle 12, Playa Calle 8, Playa Calle 4 and Playa Caribe Centro).
- 87.20 kilometers of beach rehabilitated.
- 9 beaches certified (Blue Flag):
 - Punta Esmeralda
 - Xcalacoco Beach
 - Montecarlo Beach
 - 72nd St. Beach
 - Pelicanos Beach
 - Beach 88
 - + 3 private beaches
- Punta Esmeralda ranked the BEST BEACH IN THE COUNTRY
- 10 BLUE FLAG RECOGNITIONS IN PLAYA DEL CARMEN

IN THE JUNGLE.

"Living Museum of Ancient Urban Native Trees", by MOCE Yax Cuxtal:

- Placement of 8 informative plaques and signage on an equal number of monumental trees in Playa del Carmen
- Community awareness and recognition of the environmental heritage and natural capital that these trees represent as part of Playa del Carmen's heritage.
- Activation of the community in defense of the monumental trees in cases where their safety is threatened or endangered.
- Creation of a Living Museum of Ancient Native Trees of Playa del Carmen, which serves as an educational and awareness-raising circuit for locals and tourists.
- Advocacy in Public Policy for the care of these trees on the way to declaring them URBAN MONUMENTS

IN CAVES, CENOTES AND CAVERNS. "Women, Girls and Biodiversity" by Pía Simoneta Ramos:

- 37 caves and cenotes intervened
- 51 cleanups
- Removal of waste and debris: 415 sacks of garbage, 2 truck loads for the removal of materials such as various waste, appliances, toilets, chairs, among others
- 15 active volunteers and more than 100 volunteers in large cleanups in different neighborhoods
- Mentoring for scientific research on biodiversity for girls from 4 years old to young women in their 20s
- Visibility of the work of women who, through their example, motivate young women who are pursuing a career or working to pay for their certifications and, in turn, inspire girls in their decision to study a career in the future
- Participation of 9 girls and young women in the program's actions
- Participation in 3 national congresses: National Congress of Entomology, Mexican Society of Entomology, virtual event; Mexican National Congress of Speleology, Mexican Union of Speleological Groups (UMAE), Playa del Carmen, 2021; III Latin American and Caribbean Congress of Bats, Latin American and Caribbean Network for the Conservation of Bats, Merida, 2022
- Participation in the video at the COP 15 on biodiversity, in Canada, in 2022 - Holding of the Forum for Women Naturalists of Mexico and Latin America, February 2023

Tips for other destinations

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

Promoting tourist destinations based only on the concept of "sun and beach", as was traditionally done for many years, is a challenge to overcome. In order to value other natural, cultural and social assets, which were once "erased" by the overwhelming concept of "sun and beach", it is difficult to rescue.

However, the commitments of active women and men in each locality serve as beacons of hope. These initiatives, originating from civil society, businesses, and government, must be linked together and empowered. They can act as agents of change, promoting participatory governance that values ALL ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE SITES. This requires public policies dedicated to defending, caring for, preserving, conserving, and bringing visibility to these valuable capitals.

These citizens, LISTEN TO AND FOLLOW THE SACRED CALL... that which silently motivates and guides, FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD that we want to share with a more conscious tourism in a humanity closer to nature, to life, to love...

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence. VIDEO STORY

https://youtu.be/JRUymj_hZ8A

