Água Boa I Community – When the Community Becomes the Protagonist of Transformation

RESEX CHICO MENDES- SEU SILVA, Brazil
Secretaria de turismo
Private Destinations (operating with multiple businesses)
Nature & Environment

Summary of Good Practice Story
Água Boa I, a traditional rubber-tapping and Brazil-nut-harvesting community within the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve in the Brazilian Amazon, faced expanding cattle ranching pressure and declining economic appeal of extractive livelihoods, pushing young people to leave and risking the loss of traditional forest knowledge. With support from ICMBio, Embrapa and the Federal University of Acre, residents — including respected rubber tapper Mr. Silva — turned their educational forest trail into a structured community-based tourism experience teaching visitors about medicinal plants, extractive livelihoods and forest life, while training community members in visitor management and environmental interpretation and folding the initiative into Epitaciolândia's 2024 Municipal Sustainable Tourism Plan. This created complementary income for local families without replacing traditional activities, strengthened youth engagement in trail-based education, and inspired other communities and projects such as the regional Coffee and Cheese Route. The key lesson: tourism only creates lasting benefit when communities actively lead decision-making rather than merely receive its results, and authentic, community-rooted experiences are the destination's greatest asset.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
The Água Boa I Community is located within the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, one of the most emblematic territories of the Brazilian Amazon. Surrounded by native forests and rich biodiversity, the community has preserved a way of life closely linked to nature through traditional rubber tapping and Brazil nut harvesting. More than economic activities, these practices represent a cultural heritage that shapes local identity and strengthens the relationship between people and the forest.

In Água Boa I, the forest provides food, knowledge, work, and inspiration. Community life is built on cooperation, solidarity, and the transmission of traditional knowledge from elders to younger generations. This connection is reflected in the educational forest trail, where students regularly learn from experienced residents about native tree species, medicinal plants, and the importance of conservation. The trail serves as a living classroom that combines environmental education, culture, and traditional knowledge. More than an educational activity, it preserves local heritage, strengthens community pride, and reinforces a shared commitment to protecting the Amazon and ensuring that its knowledge, values, and traditions continue to inspire future generations.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
Although the Água Boa I Community has long maintained a strong connection to its culture, traditions, and the forest, recent challenges began to threaten this balance. The expansion of cattle ranching into sensitive areas of the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, combined with the declining economic attractiveness of traditional activities such as rubber tapping and Brazil nut harvesting, raised concerns among residents. As more young people sought opportunities outside the community, there was a growing risk of losing traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and the deep relationship with nature that defines local identity.

Faced with this reality, community members realized that creating new economic opportunities was essential to preserving both their territory and way of life. Tourism emerged as a sustainable alternative, offering a way to generate complementary income while protecting the forest and valuing traditional knowledge. By welcoming visitors interested in learning about medicinal plants, extractive livelihoods, and daily life in the Amazon, the community created new perspectives for local families and younger generations. More than an economic activity, tourism became a tool for strengthening community pride and demonstrating that a standing forest, living culture, and ancestral knowledge can provide the foundation for a sustainable future.

The Vision: What you set out to do
Together with municipal authorities, partner institutions, and local residents, the Água Boa I Community developed a vision for community-based tourism rooted in its greatest assets: the forest, traditional knowledge, and the extractive way of life. The goal was to share the richness

of Amazonian biodiversity and local culture with visitors while preserving the authenticity of the territory and strengthening community pride.

Supported by partnerships with organizations such as ICMBio and Embrapa, the initiative focused on transforming traditional knowledge into meaningful visitor experiences. Educational activities, interpretive trails, medicinal plant knowledge, and stories of life in the forest became central elements of the tourism experience. At the same time, efforts were made to create income opportunities compatible with forest conservation, ensuring that tourism would complement rather than replace traditional livelihoods.

Tourism, environmental education, and culture were treated as inseparable elements. This vision was incorporated into the Municipal Sustainable Tourism Plan (2024), aligning community initiatives with public policies and reinforcing a shared commitment to conserving the forest while creating sustainable opportunities for future generations.

The Journey: How change happened

The development of this initiative was a gradual and participatory process built around the knowledge, aspirations, and experiences of the Água Boa I Community. Families, community leaders, teachers, students, and institutional partners worked together to transform the educational forest trail into a structured visitor experience. The trail was designed using local stories, traditional knowledge, and community perspectives, ensuring that it authentically reflected the relationship between residents and the forest. Teachers helped maintain its educational purpose, while Mr. Silva, a respected rubber tapper, contributed his extensive knowledge of native species and traditional forest uses. (Video 1)

Technical support from the Federal University of Acre (UFAC) strengthened the initiative through the identification of native and medicinal plant species. The integration of scientific research and traditional wisdom created an authentic experience where visitors learn about extractive livelihoods, conservation practices, and the cultural significance of the forest. (Photo 01)

As the project evolved, community members received training in sustainable tourism, visitor management, and environmental interpretation, reinforcing their role as leaders of the initiative. New experiences, including demonstrations of medicinal plants and activities related to the rubber production cycle, enriched the visitor journey. (Video 4)

From the beginning, tourism was designed to support forest conservation. Visitor management followed low-impact principles, including small-scale visitation, visitor orientation, and responsible use of natural resources. This approach was strengthened through collaboration between the community, the Municipality of Epitaciolândia, and institutional partners, ensuring alignment with conservation and sustainable tourism policies.

The process also involved overcoming important challenges. Seasonal accessibility issues were addressed through preventive and corrective road maintenance carried out by the municipality, improving safe access for residents, students, and visitors. (Photo 02) Infrastructure limitations were tackled through continuous trail maintenance and awareness campaigns encouraging students to use appropriate clothing and footwear during forest activities. (Photos 03 and 04)

Another challenge was helping residents understand the potential of tourism as a development opportunity. Community meetings and discussions created spaces for dialogue about the benefits, responsibilities, and opportunities associated with tourism. These conversations strengthened local ownership, increased community pride, and reinforced the understanding that every resident plays an important role in preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Água Boa I.

Through collective effort, continuous learning, and strong community engagement, the initiative evolved into a model of community-based tourism that strengthens local identity, supports conservation, and creates opportunities for future generations.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The results of the Água Boa I initiative extend far beyond numbers, reflecting a profound transformation in the relationship between the community and its territory. Tourism has created complementary income opportunities for local families, reducing dependence on traditional extractive activities while demonstrating that the forest can generate economic value without being cleared. This has strengthened residents' confidence in building sustainable livelihoods based on their own knowledge, culture, and natural resources.

Environmental benefits have also become evident. The forest is now increasingly recognized not only as a natural asset but as a source of educational, cultural, and economic opportunities. Biodiversity, once taken for granted as part of daily life, has become a central element of visitor experiences, reinforcing conservation efforts and reducing pressure on natural resources.

Socially, the initiative has strengthened community engagement through regular meetings and collective decision-making processes. Young people have become more involved in educational trails and tourism activities, discovering new opportunities within their own community and developing a stronger sense of belonging. At the same time, traditional knowledge has gained greater recognition, with residents becoming valued interpreters of local culture, medicinal plants, and extractive practices.

Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the community's renewed perception of the forest. Once seen mainly as a source of subsistence, it is now also viewed as a source of opportunity,

pride, and hope, forming the foundation for a future that combines conservation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. (Photos 07, 08 and 09)

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

The Água Boa I experience generated lessons that extend far beyond tourism development. One of the most important was the understanding that tourism only creates lasting benefits when the community actively participates in decision-making and leads the process. Through meetings, dialogue, and collective planning, residents became not just beneficiaries, but protagonists in shaping their own future.

Another key lesson was the importance of continuously strengthening the sense of belonging. By valuing local history, traditional knowledge, and the wisdom of elders, the community recognized that everyday practices—such as the use of medicinal plants, rubber tapping, Brazil nut harvesting, and living in harmony with the forest—represent a living heritage capable of generating opportunities while preserving cultural identity.

The initiative also reinforced that authenticity is the community's greatest asset. Residents realized that visitors value genuine experiences rooted in local culture and nature. The process demonstrated that development must be participatory and respect the limits of the territory. Small actions built through cooperation and shared purpose strengthened community pride, increased environmental awareness, and confirmed that preserving local identity and the forest can create sustainable opportunities for future generations.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

What began as a local initiative to value traditional knowledge and strengthen the connection between the community and the forest evolved into a broader model for sustainable development. The Água Boa I experience has inspired other communities in Epitaciolândia, demonstrating that community-based tourism can create economic opportunities while preserving cultural identity and natural resources. It has also influenced projects such as the Coffee and Cheese Route, helping expand sustainable tourism opportunities across the municipality.

The initiative has contributed to a new understanding of tourism as a tool for environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. By highlighting traditional knowledge, extractive practices, and the relationship between people and nature, it has strengthened Epitaciolândia's identity and increased awareness of the importance of protecting the Amazon. Perhaps its greatest impact has been within the community itself, where residents have gained renewed pride in their heritage and recognized the value of their knowledge, traditions, and way of life as foundations for a more sustainable future.

Awards or Certifications

Web Articles

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"We have learned that protecting the forest is not only about preserving what we have always had, but also about creating new opportunities without losing who we are. Today, we show visitors that it is possible to make a living from the forest while caring for it at the same time."
— Rozinei Silva - Resident of the Água Boa I Community

“The educational trail led by Mr. Silva in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve is an important tool for environmental education, cultural appreciation, and the preservation of traditional forest knowledge. Through this experience, students and visitors have the opportunity to explore Amazonian biodiversity, learn about medicinal plants that have been used for generations by extractive communities, and understand the respectful and balanced relationship that local families maintain with nature. More than a learning activity, the trail strengthens the transmission of traditional knowledge, raises awareness about environmental conservation, and highlights the importance of keeping the forest standing as a source of life, health, cultural identity, and sustainable opportunities for future generations.”
- Jonas Cavalcante - Municipal Secretary of Tourism of Epitaciolândia