

TO DO! 2004
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism

Award Winner

FINCA SONADOR PROJECT TOURISM

represented by:

**Mrs. Edith Quijano-Ruanos
Comité de Turismo, Finca Sonador
Cooperativa Longo Mai
San Isidro P.Z. Costa Rica**

Rationale for the Award

by

Dr. Christian Adler

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2004 the author travelled to San Isidro de El General, Costa Rica, in order to assess on location the application of the Finca Sonador Comité de Turismo. He did so on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.).

The assessor proposes that FINCA SONADOR be awarded the TODO!- price in appreciation of the objectives, concepts and realisation of its projects.

2. BACKGROUND

In recent years, Costa Rica has developed into an internationally known tourist destination. Every year about a million tourists visit this small Central-American country, which profits from its "green image" (ecological tourism) and, apart from its fascinating rainforests, produce huge varieties in flora and fauna. Costa Rica is moderately priced, politically stable and considered to be a safe travel destination.

Costa Rica's numerous ecological natural parks make up 25% of the nation's territory. The country offers not only eco-tourist highlights, but also its beaches. On both, the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean, Costa Rica has an inviting tropical coastline with good infrastructure and an attractive choice of hotels. Nature-lovers and trekking tourists are drawn to the active volcanoes, and the wellness locations attract tourists looking for modern thermal bath treatments. With a total volume of US-\$ 1.08 billion (2002) tourism has become one of the most important earners of foreign currency. According to the German Foreign Office, traditional export products like coffee and bananas have lost their dominating role and "Costa Rica has developed from an agro-cultural society into a service industry and industrial nation". These two sectors (including tourism) produce more than 65 % of GNP. With its population of 4.2 million the per capita GNP is \$ 4.271. An agricultural worker earns a minimum of 78.000 Colones and a teacher about 180.000 Colones (46.000 Colones equal US-\$ 100, as of early 2005).

3. TOURISM PROJECT IN FINCA SONADOR

3.1 History of the project

The FINCA SONADOR is located in the Northwest of Costa Rica, about 160 km south of the capital San Jose and about 30 km from the provincial town of San Isidro El General – far away from any typical tourist destination.

The FINCA SONADOR was founded in 1979 as a shelter for refugees from Nicaragua who had to escape dictator Somoza's regime of terror. Founders of the FINCA SONADOR are the cooperatives of "Longo Mai" (Provençal: "may it last long") with headquarters in France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. These as cooperatives organised communities intended to provide an alternative to the common refugee camps with their frequently degrading living conditions and to help the refugees to build a permanent home. In 1979, these cooperatives bought an area of 800 hectares where those refugees could settle.

After the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua the refugees returned home. Families from El Salvador, which had to leave their war-shattered country at the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, came in their place. Moreover, farmers without land from Costa Rica, people escaping poverty and members of the last indigenous populations of Costa Rica, mainly from the Cabecar tribe, also found a new home on the FINCA SONADOR. (The name FINCA SONADOR describes the yearning for a peaceful patch of land and means "the serene estate.")

In this way, a village of 400 was gradually formed on the Finca. Of these, 21 families are from El Salvador and 16 from Costa Rica. Another eleven are of indigenous origin, six families are based on various origins, and two families are from Switzerland and Austria, respectively.

3.2 The economic and financial condition

Economically, the people on the FINCA SONADOR have an independent way of life: They grow corn, beans, cassava roots, bananas and a variety of fruit trees. They have milk, eggs and meat. Two small shops add to the supply of everyday life. The village has a boarding school and a catholic and a protestant church. Although one can find some motor vehicles, the village people mainly use their horses as a means of transport. They also keep goats and cattle, produce some cheese for their personal use and make local specialities from sugarcane and cocoa.

However, the main source of income of the village is the production of coffee. Second ranks the production of sugarcane. Today, additional income is generated from project tourism. However, it is evident from the net income of the village that people on the FINCA SONADOR lead a modest life. In the previous year, the village produced a total of \$ 52.445 from coffee, \$ 53.110 from growing sugarcane, and another \$ 34.666 from tourism (about 25% of total income). A theoretical evenly balanced distribution among all 54 families would give every family a gross income of \$ 2.600 per year. Nevertheless, the net income is much lower as farmers have to pay for the transportation of sugarcane and coffee and all other means of production.

Besides, some families possess much less than others. For example, the family of Don Transito with eight children has to live on \$ 25 a month. As a result, a particular notion rarely mentioned in our individualistic societies is considered a high value: the art of enduring together, called "Convivencia," through everyday neighbourhood support.

Only half of the area surrounding FINCA SONADOR is farmland. 150 hectares are covered by untouched (primary) rain forest. Another 250 hectares are considered to be self-contained secondary forest in good condition. The forest is distinguished by a big variety of tropical plant species and there is a well-preserved fauna with monkeys, snakes, armadillos, toucans and many other bright-feathered birds of Central America.

3.3 Concept and objectives

It is a mayor concern of the cooperative to improve the status of the forests by means of a reforestation with rare endemic species and to protect additional areas of forest around from complete clearing. To the south of the FINCA SONADOR, natural habitats have already been destroyed. Mono-cultural pineapple farmland (by Del Monte) spreads across thousands of hectares. In the north of FINCA SONADOR another big company acquired large areas for coffee farming. Somehow, the FINCA SONADOR forests function as a "green lung" between those areas.

On the Finca, every inhabitant can go after his or her life independently. The only rule that applies to everyone is the prohibition to cut down trees or to sell the land in use. Owner of the land always remains the "Asociacion Cooperativa Europeas Longo Mai" with headquarters in

Basel, Switzerland. The farmer families themselves are organized in the so-called "Asociacion de Productores Campesinos del Sonador". This association pays a symbolic rent of one Colon per year, hectare and family (450 Colones equal 1US-\$). The rent contracts can be handed down to the next generation. In fact, the families have all the rights of land owners, with exception of the right to sell land.

Control of the fortune of the village by the European cooperatives of Longo Mai is not and was never intended. Although the Austrian representative Roland Spendlingwimmer has been present from the start as a European, he has a coordinating role only.

3.4 Organisational structure

The villagers of FINCA SONADOR make their own decisions about developments and hold a general assembly once a month. On that occasion, committees are elected which are concerned with general interests of the village, for ways to improve infrastructure like electricity, maintenance of roads, drinking water supply, etc. Accordingly, there is a "Comité de Agua", a "Comité de Camino" and also a "Junta de Educación" consisting of parents energetic on issues such as nursery school and education. Another committee is the "Comité de Turismo". This committee was founded when increasing numbers of foreign visitors to the village had to be looked after in an organized manner.

Today, 30 families can accommodate guests. The tourism committee meets once a month in order to discuss the latest issues relevant to either the host families or the entire village. Topics of discussion may be the price structuring, the minimum lodging requirements, measures for the improvement of service and tourist information. Other topics may include: the education of guides for the ecological, archaeological and agro-cultural attractions, the effects of foreign tourism as such on the community or the best course of tourism development. The tourism committee is elected or confirmed annually.

3.5 Project tourism on the FINCA SONADOR

Guests arriving on the FINCA SONADOR are accommodated and looked after by a local host family. They are charged \$ 7.00 per day, of which a small part is advanced to the tourism committee in the form of a tax on visitors. Guests are either accommodated directly in the host families' home where they are offered a spare room, or in a small annex building, a so-called "Cabina". The activities offered to visitors include strolls and trips into the vicinity or an "ecological education trail". Guests can also hire horses and local guides for a tour into the area; they can take lessons in Spanish, participate in the everyday routine of the families (e.g. in particular agricultural work) or go for a visit to the beaches of the Pacific Ocean.

Looked at from a distance, it may seem the FINCA SONADOR offers "holidays on the farm" in its Costa Rican version. However, that would be conventional agro-tourism where guests are purely consumers paying for a service. The tourism practised here, however, does not follow this pure service-orientated type. Here, guests are temporarily members of the family, and while they are looked after and cared for, they are also expected to participate on a personal level.

From an external viewpoint, it is surprising to learn that the average duration of stay is not limited to the usual two or three weeks (that type of "short holiday" is actually quite rare). In

fact, quite the opposite is true. On average, visitors stay from two to six months. These long-term tourists usually develop into fully integrated members of family and feel accordingly. Their participation in the "Convivencia" is self-evident.

A lot of such opportunities are at hand: Visitors achieve according to their abilities and become so called "Voluntarios" (voluntary workers): Some teach languages like English, German or French, some help the children in school or teach the alphabet to adults who never had the chance to visit a school back in El Salvador. Others conduct workshops on issues such as first aid, family planning, contraception, gender issues, computer skills or the understanding of rain forest biology. Initiatives also include art courses, a theatre group, a basketball team and a football-team, the creation of a soccer pitch (very important!) and so on!

What the individual visitor may decide to contribute remains his choice. Everyone is free in accordance with a maxim that has been with the village from the start: to be "free" in sense of "free from any hierarchy". There are no orders, everyone is supposed to find which parts of oneself fit in the community. One learns to move in a heterogeneous and "horizontal" society. This, however, requires each individual to set his goals and to measure success or failure with the people affected.

The "Voluntarios" meet once a week to discuss their activities. New suggestions can be made and checked for suitability. In this way new projects are constantly created and accomplished exclusively from voluntary work – projects that contribute to the further development of the village. It is worth noting that scientific research has taken place on the Finca with a focus on issues relevant to its life and environment and the results of which will finally be to the benefit of the village.

There is hardly a villager who has been on the FINCA SONADOR (founded in 1979) longer than 22 years. Children and adolescents constitute the majority of the community. However, at an average age of 18 to 28 years, the foreign residents of the FINCA SONADOR are quite young, too.

This is the result of the reasonable prices young people are charged for their stay, so they can actually afford a long-term visit. They come from Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France or England, a few also from the USA and Canada. Some have just left high school, taking a year abroad before commencing their studies. Others are students on vacation or young people on unpaid leave like nurses, social workers and teachers; or Germans and Austrians on community service; or graduates writing their dissertations and PhD thesis here on the FINCA SONADOR.

Particularly remarkable is the high number of young women living with local families. This gender inequity is probably caused by the demand for a higher degree of social commitment that attracts more women than men.

The assessor was told that women make a kind of personal experience on the FINCA SONADOR they could not make in our more alienated societies: the cohesion of an extended family, mutual compassion and affection, security and a place at the heart of a family.

4. APPRAISAL OF THE PROJECT

Assessing the activities of the FINCA SONADOR cooperative with TODO!-criteria for socially responsible tourism produces the following valuation:

Contest criterion:

Involving of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation

The FINCA SONADOR community exists primarily through the returns from its economy of subsistence. Above all, the cultivation of coffee, sugarcane and some cocoa is usually the only source of income for farmers in Costa Rica. As a result of the wavering price for coffee and sugar on the world market, this type of cultivation is very risky. As a consequence, there is a continuous interest for finding new sources of income.

The kind of project tourism found on the FINCA SONADOR was not initially intended in this form. It developed gradually as a result of a step-by-step growth in the numbers of visitors, including long-term visitors that were initially hosted for free.

As a result of this increase, the local general assembly elected the tourism committee in order to make sure that all host families planning to accommodate guests could also participate and get a fair price for their service.

The tourism committee administers the charged tax on tourism of 100 Colones per day (3.5% of the daily rate for accommodation and catering) and accounts to the general assembly for its activities. The committee is elected or its composition confirmed annually.

Meanwhile, project tourism generates 25 % of the village's gross income. Compared to the production of coffee and sugarcane, however, tourism has a higher share in net income because leaving guests contribute substantially through donations, by financing scholarships for the education of children and so on (more on that later).

In this way, project tourism has established another important source of income for the locals, giving every community member a chance to participate in one way or the other.

Contest criterion:

Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life

Questions on chances and risks of tourism on the FINCA SONADOR are the subject of ongoing discussions and addressed at the monthly meetings of the tourism committee.

A small example: The two small shops of the village sell no alcohol, not even beer. The required license would have to be granted by the general assembly of the cooperative.

It is understood that foreign visitors and young locals have a desire for the occasional beer. This, however, is perceived as a "vice". In order to avoid negative consequences for the families as a result of alcohol consumption, the cooperative obstructs the access to alcohol by refusing to grant any such license.

On the occasion of the TODO! application, the tourism committee questioned 19 school children between 12 and 14 years of age on how they thought village life was affected by tourism. The replies were sophisticated, sometimes critical, but overall positive. All children perceived the economic impact on the village positively. Their comments reflect not only what the children think about foreigners, but also what are publicly undisclosed thoughts, e.g. how their parents feel about the guests and their influence on the village.

Altogether, the children made 56 positive and 26 negative assessments on tourism.

The questions were:

1. What do think about tourism on the Finca?
(Answers: 16 positive / 3 negative)
2. Is tourism a bad thing? Yes or no and why?
(Answers: 5 positive / 6 negative /6 neutral)
3. Do tourists give a good example? Yes or no and why?
(Answers: 10 positive or ambivalent, 9 negative)
4. Do you want more or fewer Tourists to come here in the future?
(Answers: majority positive for "more")

A few examples:

- I think tourism is good! They (the guests) help the people with their work.
- Tourism is actually very good, because people with little money get some more food.
- Tourism is good, because tourists care for animals and trees; they also protect rivers and mountains and teach us English.
- The tourists help us, and we have to make use of the actual conditions in order to improve our lives.
- Some give us a good example, because they study here and teach us other languages.
- Tourism is good, because tourists get along well with the people and because they like nature.
- It seems to me that tourism is sometimes strange because tourists are dressed ridiculously.
- No, because they have habits that are not like ours, e.g. piercing.
- No, some don't give us a good example with their load of rings all over their body. Others, however, do give us a good example, because they come in order to study and walk around and don't go to bed with the men.
- Some not, because they have vices.
- I think they give us a bad example because they smoke cigarettes and drink beer.
- Yes, more of them should come because this is a big support for the poor families.
- Yes, because they continuously teach us a lot of things.
- I would like to have more of them come here, because they can help us to preserve our tradition.

Contest criterion:

Participation of a broad local population strata regarding the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

The tourism committee manages the allocation of visitors to the families. Each arriving guest has to register with Mrs. Edith Quijano-Ruanos, who mediates guest and host. She keeps track of things and makes sure every potential host family gets its share of visitors. The tourism committee also fixes the standard price guests pay directly to the families. This system avoids

disadvantages and competition and is only compromised when guests visit a family for the second time: visitors usually wish to be hosted by the family they already have a relationship with.

Typically, guests make payments directly to the hostess. This is noteworthy, since the men usually administer all other income generated from coffee, sugarcane or day-labour. In this way, women have the chance to earn extra income apart from seasonal labour on coffee plantations.

Budgets generated from the tax on visitors are spent on community projects. Currently, the funding of two small suspension-bridges is planned; so coffee pickers can safely reach the plantations at high water. This also helps non-hosting families. Furthermore, those families can always supplement their income by the very presence of tourism through such things as hiring out horses or working as guides.

In addition to the direct income obtained from their young guests, the families receive an "equivalence to financial profit" from voluntary work hours. There is also a number of additional contributions that the village can profit from after guests are back home.

As a result of the close personal relationships with the families, visitors feel responsible for the well being of "their family", or "their village" respectively. Having lived under the same conditions, one is simply familiar with the economic worries. So, many former guests encourage donations back in their home countries and the result of these efforts is remarkable.

Here are some examples:

A single mother with three children who had practically no income from farming has been donated a modern "Cabina" with 2 rooms, a toilet and a shower. Another widow with many children has also received a small Cabina with two rooms. The new income generated from hosting visitors now gives these women a chance to make a decent living. Until today, former guests have made the following financial contributions:

- \$ 500 for the construction of a new house.
- The renovation of a family home (kitchen and patio)
- Purchase of a new house
- Purchase of an engine for the fodder mill (\$ 750)
- A sewing-machine for leather workers
- An "Artesania" for four families (small trade shop)
- Travels for refugees to El Salvador to visit their relatives
- Travel to Europe (return visits to former guests)
- Purchase of land in El Salvador for one refugee family
- Reconstruction or mending of homes in El Salvador after an earthquake

In addition, 40 adolescents from the FINCA SONADOR have received scholarships to visit high school, go to university or study from home respectively. The promotion worth \$ 500 – 1.000 per student per year is financed by former visiting families from Europe and the USA.

The economic benefit for the FINCA SONADOR inhabitants from project tourism massively exceeds the \$ 7.00 for full board tourists are asked to pay to the families.

Socially and culturally, the presence of foreign visitors is beneficial for villagers mainly due to the many voluntary activities that all families can gain from. Visitors make contact with all inhabitants and a constant cultural exchange takes place, to which religious, cultural and sports events are instrumental.

Contest criterion:

Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training

The label "tourist job" is an inappropriate description since the FINCA SONADOR is not a venture serving holiday guests, but a village that offers family contact. Actually, guests not only live together with the local people but also position themselves within a number of projects in a way the locals could not. They give support to education and further education and try to improve infrastructure alongside with locals. This, too, ultimately contributes to the social security of the village.

Contest criterion:

Reinforcement of the local culture as well as the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas

As indicated in the beginning, the inhabitants of the FINCA SONADOR don't belong to one ethnic group with a collective "cultural heritage". On the one hand, these people originate from completely different regions, on the other hand any ethnically homogenous people, like the Cabecar, have long since become alienated from their own native culture. What unites the inhabitants of the Finca is both their common destiny as refugees and their poverty brought about by loss of land and livelihood. They are also united by the loss of their native country. Here on the Finca, the people first found a collective refuge, then they found a new home. So once again they can lead a sovereign life.

A feeling of personal dignity is constantly confirmed by the visitor's attitude, as these don't look down on the villagers as economically and culturally inferior people, but as equals (for exceptions see below). Visitors adapt to the simple living conditions as good as they can. This distinguishes the "tourists" on the FINCA SONADOR from other tourists. They don't expect to be served breakfast like in a hotel and they don't complain about some holiday standards this reality would not meet. And they don't ask: "What will these people do for me today?" but think about "what can I do for these people?"

This strengthens the self-confidence of the villagers and they don't need to conceal their poverty from those better off or, to put it more strongly, feel like "servants" to the "sahibs". Anyhow, as a result of success in school and with visitor-lead group activities like theatre, the circus and drawing classes, local children show a visible growth in self-confidence and a capacity for self-reliance.

This kind of influence on the locals gives them for the first time access to topics that were previously met with indifference or completely unknown, like thoughts on natural preservation, or the significance of forests and headwaters, medical plants and petroglyphs (ancient stone engravings). Awareness is also created on profane issues such as safe garbage disposal as it is practiced on the Finca.

Contest Criterion:

Avoidance or minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas

The guests on the Finca are willing to be integrated into the everyday lives and work in the village. Languages are taught on a mutual basis and as a result of the close living together a constant exchange of ideas takes place between young members of the first world and those of the so called third world.

However, foreigners eventually display a noticeable ethnocentric viewpoint. Due to a lack of experience, some young visitors underestimate cultural differences and initially entertain a right to criticise the others way of life. They make comments like: "they don't show initiative" (we do), "I wonder why they don't make a plan" (we do), "they don't do it right" (we do). These attitudes can strengthen the impression of the local population that everything seems to be better in the industrialized world. In order to counter these ways of thinking, a workshop was organized and participants had to look into the basic principles of an undamaging, mutual relationship between guests and the villagers.

Project tourism can also show other negative effects (see the questioning of school children above: "They drink beer, they smoke, they are dressed in stupid fashion, the women go to bed with our men"). In an agro-culturally shaped, religious and conservative society these manners and attitudes have to offend. In addition, Europeans have other habits that meet little sympathy in the Costa Rican countryside. Here, the day starts at 5 a.m. and ends at 9 to 10 p.m. Young Europeans often stay up late into the night and have their sleep out. This creates tensions. Some habits are regarded as "vice" with an undesirable impact on the village youth. On the issue of young people's sexuality the TODO! application reads: "Love affairs" occur. And in another place: "To minimize these dangers, tourists should be confronted on these issues. There shall be a joint effort to address this problem."

It is important to weigh up these influences and to relate them to the many advantages for the village from the presence of its young guests. The activities of the visitors undoubtedly bring change to the cultural life of the village. However, the negative effects seem less important as the visitors projects not only have a strengthening and supporting effect on local identity as a whole and but also lead to positive change.

It is more important to keep off those visitors that do not fit into the FINCA SONADOR community because they cannot or do not want to integrate into its "way of life" and because they have attitudes that are not accepted even in our society, like drug abuse. Here, the Internet website has a filtering function as it contains a clear description of what visitors can expect. Additionally, every arriving visitor has to take note of a detailed dossier on location before deciding to stay on the Finca.

The dossier reads: "We expect students, volunteers, interns and community service workers to leave behind the euro-centric vision and be prepared to shed the burden of so called 'European Civilization'. We expect a sympathetic understanding, self-reliance, resourcefulness and a desire to dive into another culture."

Up till now, no visitor was ever turned down. With the exception of the aforementioned Internet site, the tourism committee deliberately does little to advertise actively or otherwise increase the popularity of the FINCA SONADOR in Europe and the USA. Here, word of former visitors was sufficient to attract more guests. There is good faith that sympathetic visitors suitable for the life on the FINCA SONADOR will reproduce from their own social network.

Contest criterion:**Projects and measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility**

As can be heard from the FINCA SONADOR, agro-cultural production still heavily relies on chemicals. In particular, the cultivation of coffee seems to show effects of earlier pesticide and insecticide use that cannot be eliminated that quickly. However, an adjustment to ecological methods of agricultural production is aimed at including the marketing of organically produced and self-roasted coffee via the Longo Mai network in Europe.

Even in 1993 a three-week seminar took place about "ecology and sustainable development". The event ignited 20 surrounding villages to found a farmers association for the protection of the river environment in the buffer-area of "La Amistad", which also includes the FINCA SONADOR. FINCA SONADOR visitors from the very beginning supported the association and today one community service worker is active there.

The association runs tree-nurseries with endemic species like fruit-trees and medical plants and also organizes ecological education in schools. Here, the "Voluntarios" make a substantial contribution, such as skilfully informing hundreds of school children about the significance of the tropical rain forest. Two volunteers, one of them a biologist, established an ecological education trail called "Sendero Perezoso" and also illustrated a booklet which goes with it.

On FINCA SONADOR grounds a conference building was constructed, including a community kitchen and an office. The building is also the centre for the monitoring of forest exploitation and preservation and for the management of reforestation.

Contest criterion:**Securing the future - Which measures or mechanisms can guarantee the economical and institutional sustainability of the project?**

In line with the status quo, the economical and institutional sustainability of the project is guaranteed. However, one has to keep in mind the limits to overall lodging capacity. The assessor estimates that full capacity is reached with 20 foreign visitors. On his own initiative, one local has opened a language school (Riosonador Language Institute) that attracts additional foreigners, so in summer a total of 40 guests is likely. The village is very small. If the wish of some children or their families for "more tourists" was granted, lodging capacity would be strained over limits. It is unlikely that any further commercialisation (like the language school) is to the benefit of the village, because too much social benevolence can harm the village and completely transform its atmosphere and character.

Currently there is an additional chance for commitment in a project for street children in San Jose that was initiated by Roland Spendlingwimmer. In this project, some guests of the FINCA SONADOR are active already.

The tourism committee should realise that a further expansion would threaten the sustainability of the project. Instead, spreading the model of "Finca Sonador project tourism" to neighbouring villages seems a better idea.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result of the falling price of coffee in recent years, the population understands how quickly a source of income can vanish. Similar risks can be found concerning tourism. Most inhabitants of the FINCA SONADOR are refugees and have experienced terrifying personal tragedies including a complete loss of their livelihood. So these people know the importance of protecting their traditional economy of subsistence. The project tourism that has developed on the FINCA SONADOR is, therefore, a welcome additional source of income. However, the "Comité de Turismo" emphasizes that the easy money earned must not lead the following generations into neglect for farming which again would create a dangerous dependency on tourism. As a result, the assessor has the impression that people are already well aware of the dangers of dependency on tourism and that practical solutions to this problem will be found.

On the other hand, the form of project tourism on the FINCA SONADOR provides a vivid example for an authentic, cross-cultural encounter. A visitor to this village will surely transform from peripheral spectator into experiencing another way of life from the inside. Guests are completely immersed in the life of the village, participate in everyday life and make an active contribution to the development of the village. Accordingly, a long-term stay of months forms friendships with locals and personal links to host families that continue even after visitors have left.

It is particularly pleasing to see that this programme is designed for young people who were raised in the cities of our affluent society. Usually, European youths have never experienced need or felt physically what it means to live under developing world conditions. On the FINCA SONADOR, most of them find themselves beamed into another world and learn personally that what seemed completely normal and self-evident is actually not self-evident everywhere. This way, the locals of the FINCA SONADOR are in some way giving meaning to it all.

Their way of life is completely different and their life rhythm is shaped by the sun and the coffee crop. The people of the Finca lead a simple life, not because they are materially worse off compared to us Europeans, but because they expect less from life: health, ease and enough food. Everything else is superfluous. Here, the stress and consumption of western countries is a far cry and people don't have to chase happiness. Their capacity to give a meaning to life irrespective of material concerns is a completely new experience and source of new insights for young visitors.

Along these lines young visitors frequently develop a new attitude to life and a new way of looking at the world around them. A place of cross-cultural encounter with this kind of potential is quite rare in tourism. A better way of promoting young people's respect and tolerance for other cultures and societies will be hard to find.