



Durham - San Ramón Sister Communities

Hermanamiento News

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‘Why has eco-tourism caught on so well in San Ramón?’

By Candace Carraway

Well, to start, it's a fun trip, and last year's tourists are telling their friends about it. The trip is full of surprises. You see animals in the wild that previously you had only seen on public television or in a zoo. You don't know what is around the next corner. You talk with people who have life experiences very different from your own and your fellow travelers are a pretty interesting crowd. You make friends with the locals and walk in their shoes for a short time during your homestay. The food is outstanding. The hammocks at the farm invite you for a test drive. Musicians serenade you around a camp fire. You don't have to make any logistical arrangements beyond showing up at the airport on time. You feel taken care of by the staff at the farm and the local guides. You feel good about supporting a community-based project. You plant a tree and wonder if it will really grow three feet by next year. Maybe you'll return next year to check it out.

What do you do all week on the eco-tour?

The trip balances eco-activities and cultural immersion. Most of the eco-stuff happened at the gorgeous Finca Esperanza Verde, where we spent the first four days. Schooled by the farm staff on growing shade-grown coffee and the multitude of chores that go along with it (like tending numerous gigantic compost piles), we planted shade trees, and learned to grind and roast coffee as they do in the countryside.

The staff accompanied us on our exploration of the rain forest, pointing out wildlife, discussing flora. It was beautiful, misty, and many of us returned on our own to hike the trails in solitude. The monkeys were a highlight, especially watching the moms and babies.

The butterfly house at the Finca is fascinating. The project is working with the NC Museum of Life and Science to export pupae, which is a complicated task. This is one of many ways in which the local economy benefits from maintaining the rain forest and is a critical part of the work of Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities.

We brought a gift of several baseballs to a campesino ball game. The captain of the home team was honored that tourists would consider it worthwhile and fun to watch two local teams on a Sunday afternoon.

On our way into town as we left the serenity of the finca, we had the pleasure of distributing school supplies (donated by the project) and seeing firsthand what the underpaid teachers are up against. When we arrived in the village of San Ramón, local teenagers who have organized

themselves into a guide club greeted us and escorted us to the homes we would be staying in for three nights.

Each day brought different activities: a visit to the Catholic church, watching the local faithful visit the stations of the Cross, visits to the library, natural herb garden, natural pharmacy (where most people get their medicine since drugs are not affordable), learning the local legends relating to a vein of gold running under the town and the abandoned mine, more birding, a day trip to the regional capital to look at murals, buy souvenirs, and a trip to the bank. One of the local community leaders shared with us her experiences during the Revolution against Somoza's dictatorship.

Apart from the scheduled activities, there was the unexpected: horses hitched next to one of the few stop signs in town, ads for a disco party, shoe shine boys and Eskimo pies. Maybe the best part was the chance to experience



Tourists help by planting trees at Finca Esperanza Verde.

daily life with a local family — the roosters at the crack of dawn, the warm nights, the ubiquitous smell of wood stoves, the importance of family, the struggle to survive in a battered economy.

How does eco-tourism fit into the overall goals of the DSRSC project?

Here's how eco-tourism benefits the community: first, the trip fee paid by tourists stays in Nicaragua as payment for goods and services, salaries of staff at the Finca who work with the tourists, members of the teen guide

(Continued on page 2)

club, hostesses of the guest houses, musicians who provide entertainment, and local farmers who provide horseback riding and ox-cart demonstrations. And let's not forget the wonderful cooks who give the tourists lessons in preparing a local delicacy -- nacatamales. Our community based ecotourism approach creates new opportunities for people to support themselves through their own initiative. Our non-paternalistic approach brings pride and joy to the community which at first was incredulous that foreign tourists would find anything to interest them in San Ramón.

Second, environment-based tourism provides an economic incentive to protect the natural resources that draw tourists. For example, a local family tipped us off when howler monkeys were within a short walk of the Finca and were financially rewarded for the information. In this way, the community has come to regard local wildlife as a resource instead of a nuisance. The butterfly export project reinforces the message that there is economic value to the rain forest.

**Call today to join the June 10-17 cultural immersion
eco-tour with trip leader Ken Knight, former
Peace Corps volunteer and professional social worker.**

919 661-1965

<kenbknight@hotmail.com>

www.durham-sanramon.org

Third, each year, we set aside 10% of the eco-tour income to support a project of importance to the community. This year, we'll use the funds to build a school for young kids who live close to the Finca but are not within walking distance of a school.

What's next?

Although we are always looking for ways to improve the eco-tours, no big changes are planned. The feedback from tourists is that our one-week trips strike the right balance between eco-tourism and cultural immersion. You feel good about the positive impact of the project on the local economy.

We hope to double the number of tourists again in 2003 and to identify organizations and groups that want to take the lead in organizing and recruiting their members to spend a week in San Ramón. Contact me, Candace Carraway (919-493-3208) or Lonna Harkrader (919 489-1656) if you're interested or know someone who is.

As for me, I'm going back to check on my tree next spring.

Gallo Pinto — Nicaragua's national dish

Cook rice and beans separately and then mix together in equal parts when both are cooked. The consistency is moist but not juicy

Note: The beans need to soak overnight. See below.

Beans

Rinse and then soak 1 cup small dried red beans overnight. They should be completely covered with water. (You may substitute canned red beans but this will not be as authentic because the small red beans Nicaraguans prefer are not available in cans.)

Cook in enough water to barely cover the beans until they are done but still firm (about 45 minutes depending on the quality of the bean). Add two cloves of garlic to the beans as they cook. Drain if any liquid remains when the beans reach a firm but cooked consistency. Set aside.

Rice

Wash and drain 1 1/2 cup long grain white rice. Set aside.

Sautee the following in a frying pan with 3 T vegetable oil:

- 1/4 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped onions
- 1/8 cup chopped tomatoes

When the onions in this mixture begin to look transparent,

add the rice which should still be wet. Fry the rice in the vegetables and oil until the uncooked rice just begins to brown, constantly stirring and scraping the rice from the bottom of the pan to prevent burning.

Add 1/4 cup juice from an orange* (squeeze an orange) as you fry the rice. This should sizzle when you add it to the mixture of rice and vegetables.

Just before the rice begins to brown add 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Cover and cook on low heat until rice is cooked. **Do not** stir rice as it cooks. Set cooked rice aside.

Combine the rice and beans

Heat 1 T vegetable oil in a frying pan. When hot, add equal amounts of beans and rice, mix and heat up until they are hot. The consistency should be moist but not juicy at all. Salt to taste.

Save extra rice or beans for other cooking projects.

Serve with a small piece of feta cheese (a cheese which resembles the home-made cheese Nicaraguans love) and warm corn tortillas.

Congratulations! You have just prepared Nicaragua's favorite dish.

*Nicaraguans use sour oranges not available in the U.S

Café San Ramón sales grow

Coffee buzz buzz is the e-mail reminder 45 volunteer Café San Ramón sellers receive once a month to place their coffee orders. From carrying green coffee beans home in our suitcases in 1995, our coffee business has grown to a sizable enterprise importing and selling more than three tons of coffee a year. In addition to the coffee sold by our volunteer network, One World Market, Durham Coop Grocery, and Ten Thousand Villages also sell Café San Ramón. Counter Culture Coffee, a specialty coffee company located in Durham, roasts our coffee for free once a month.

Café San Ramón is a specialty or "gourmet" coffee. Equally important, it is certified organic, grown under tropical shade trees preserving habitat for birds and other wildlife, and is purchased from small farmers at a fair price contributing to a decent standard of living for farmers. Currently, the price we pay is two-and-a-half times the world market price.

When we went for the first time to San Ramón in 1993, our objective was to find a sister community where people wanted to form ties of peace and friendship. We also wanted to identify crafts and other items we could purchase to both stimulate the local economy as well as to show what San Ramón produced. Leather handbags and coffee were the first items we brought back to sell in Durham. Café San Ramón was so popular we never had enough to satisfy the demand.

With the coffee income, Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities has built a beautiful eco-tourist lodge and model organic coffee farm, Finca Esperanza Verde. Both the tourism and coffee businesses are run by dozens of volunteers in Durham and eight employees in San Ramón.

The coffee grown at Finca Esperanza Verde is supplemented by gourmet quality coffee we purchase from neighboring farms. The high price we consistently pay for organic, shade-grown coffee has helped attract the attention of other coffee farmers thus stimulating the cultivation of more environmentally friendly coffee. The farmers have formed a cooperative of organic coffee producers to facilitate exportation of their coffee.

The current collapse of coffee markets and prices is caused by the World Bank making loans for coffee cultivation to too many new producers. Vietnam in a few years went from being a small producing country to becoming the second largest coffee producer in the world next to Brazil. Due to increased social awareness about "fair trade" coffee, however, more and more coffee importers and roasters especially ones which sell to colleges, buy "fair trade" coffee. This new market for fair trade coffee is bringing some relief to Nicaragua which has been thrown into economic depression as a result of the worldwide glut of coffee.

Café San Ramón is a great way to spice up your day at the office and to serve your congregation to enhance awareness or global trade issues.

To order coffee contact: 919 489-1656;
<info@sanramon.org>



Javier Martinez, one of 25 small organic coffee farmers in San Ramón, stands beside his certified organic coffee planted under the forest canopy. We purchased his coffee at the certified organic "fair trade" price of \$141 per 100 pounds.

We received this testimonial

I was traveling this month with a client, and while we were having a drink in a Moscow hotel bar, Jimmy asked me if I was planning to send him coffee for Christmas. I send coffee to select clients as gifts, and Jimmy enjoyed the coffee that he received last Christmas. In fact, Jimmy wanted to make sure that I sent him the "San Ramón" coffee. How he remembered that the coffee was from San Ramón, I do not know, but I was amazed. As a marketing exec and professor, I want you to know that the most important element in building a brand is a superior product. The demand for San Ramón coffee will continue to grow — I hope they are busy picking beans down south.

*Best regards,
Bob Stevens*

Thanks to Everyone!

You made good things happen in San Ramón.

We especially thank the following, who provided services free of charge:

Michael D. Calhoun, attorney, for creating our liability waiver

Ken Howard, PA, CPA, for filing our tax return

EMJI, Inc., web page designers located in Apex, NC, <<http://www.emji.net/>> for creating and hosting our web page

Counter Culture Coffee, for roasting Café San Ramón each month.

We thank the following for their support:

Congregations:

Duke University Chapel

Durham Friends Meeting

Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Watts Street Baptist Church

Businesses:

Counter Culture Coffee

GlaxoSmithKline for matching contributions

Durham Coop Grocery

One World Market

Ten Thousand Villages

Kroger

Schools and Clubs:

Southwest Durham Rotary Club

Cub Scout Packs 451 and 424

Duke School for Children Middle School

East Chapel Hill High School Spanish Honor Society

Cub Scout packs adopt San Ramón

The Cub Scouts of Durham-based Packs 451 and 424 have been learning about what life is like for the children of San Ramón. The Cub Scouts, ages 6-10, and their families had an opportunity in the Fall to see a slide show presentation by Lonna Harkrader and hear from their Cubmaster, John Chase, a past eco-tourist to San Ramón. The Scouts learned about school life, daily life, and recreational activities for children growing up in San Ramón. The Scouts were able to see and discuss the many differences (and some similarities) between growing up in San Ramón as compared to Durham. The presentation gave the Scouts a chance to become closer to a part of the world very different from their own.

The Cub Scout "Promise" includes the desire "to help other people" and, as part of this promise, the Scouts have decided to adopt San Ramón. In addition to hearing yearly updates about life in our sister community, the Scouts have the opportunity to donate money at each monthly Pack meeting. The money brought in by Scouts is placed in a collection jar that is surrounded by pictures and information about San Ramón. All the money raised is specifically dedicated for notebooks, pencils, etc.

To date more than \$500 has been raised! Pack 451 is sponsored by Westminster Presbyterian Church and Pack 424 is sponsored by Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. Combined, the two Packs have 75 boys participating.

**For information on how to become involved,
contact John Chase, 919 483-3835
<Cyberjchase@aol.com>**

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities

Board of Directors:

Chair: Lonna Harkrader

Vice-Chair: Candace Carraway

Secretary: Bill O'Connor

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Members: Marni Gwyther, Jonathan Sheline,

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Café San Ramón marketing: Lonna Harkrader

Coffee baggers: Gail Curry, Bill O'Connor, Sally Poland, Lyn Gould, Amanda Vanega, and Lonna Harkrader

Craft and coffee sales: John Chase, Ken Knight, Lewis Carson, and Bill O'Connor

Finca Esperanza Verde: Richard and Lonna Harkrader

Tourism: Candace Carraway, Richard and Lonna Harkrader

Database Manager: Doug Henderson-James

Translation: Adriana Oller

Newsletter editor: Jim Jensen

Supporting San Ramón's young people

We are worried about the young people because they have so few opportunities. Can you help us find ways to create a better quality of life for them so they won't turn to drugs and alcohol?" asked Marina Escorcia Pineda, president of our partner committee in San Ramón five years ago. Support for programs for children and youth has grown to form the core of our sister community work.

For the past seven years we have paid the salary of the senior year high school teacher making high school graduation possible for the first time in the history of San Ramón. Also, we donate \$2,500 each year for spiral notebooks and pencils for rural children so they can attend school.

High school Spanish honor societies have raised money to purchase textbooks for the library and high school. Formerly, the only textbook in the classroom was the one the teacher used. The textbooks are used by hordes of young library patrons every day.

This is the second year we have made it possible for the library to be open on Saturdays by donating funds to employ a librarian. We also donated a TV and VCR and more than a dozen great children's videos to be shown in the library each week. E. Chapel High School Spanish Honor Society not only sells Café San Ramón each month



Doña Marina Escorcia lovingly distributes school supplies each year to the most remote and needy of San Ramón's primary schools.

to parents and teachers, they also had a campaign this year to raise money to purchase five more videos for the library. We are raising \$1,600 to pay the salary of a highly qualified librarian this year. Local tax revenues have fallen due to the collapse of coffee prices and the local government does not have enough money to pay salaries.

Another program we have supported from our beginning nine years ago is art classes for children. When we first visited the art classes, we noticed the lack of materials. Since then we have donated crayons, acrylic paints, paint brushes, and sometimes art canvas. We buy dozens of paintings each year for sale in Durham which helps us raise money to buy more art materials and more importantly demonstrates that we value artistic expression. Our donations have also been used to renovate the art gallery

and to build a canteen where students, townspeople, and tourists may enjoy a fruit drink or meal in a charming environment. Some of the students who were enrolled in the art school when we first visited the town in 1993 are now studying fine arts at the university level while others are earning a living teaching art classes in the regional capital, Matagalpa.

"Please help us start a band," we were asked repeatedly by two San Ramón musicians. Two years ago Leslie Webster from Watts Street Baptist Church collected 14 used instruments and lots of sheet music to donate to the aspiring musicians. Within hours of receiving the donation, you could hear all over town young people practicing the scales on their band instruments. This was one of those golden moments for our sister community when everyone could feel a great surge of hope and excitement. Since then, more instruments have been donated and this year we are donating money to rent a space for band practice

**To adopt a community development project in San Ramón, please contact us at 919 489-1656
Info@sanramon.org**

and a music school where lessons are free. The band earns money when they perform for our eco-tour groups. They give free performances for various public events and hope to be hired to play at weddings and parties.

This year one of the Health Center doctors has started a new group working with teens and young mothers to reduce teen pregnancy and to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This group needed a place to meet during the day and were delighted to be allowed to share the space we are renting for the band.

Three years ago we began our community-based tourism project and needing local guides, we encouraged the founding of the Tourist Guide Club of San Ramón. The guides are teenagers interested in teaching tourists San Ramón's history, points of interest, and natural wonders. The guides research the information they share with tourists, coordinate their guide service with the tourist group leader, and organize club excursions to other tourist spots in Nicaragua to broaden their awareness of the tourist industry and to enjoy a rare outing. When we sent an intern to San Ramón last fall for three months to teach English, the guides had the opportunity to learn to speak English for the first time. As younger guides join the group we hope that the ones aging out of the club will pass on their expertise and confidence to the new guides.

And last but not least, we support San Ramón's youth baseball team, a team which won the youth league title last year.

Production of three exciting videos about San Ramón has begun. You can help transcribe the taped interviews in both English and Spanish, and write grant proposals for funding. Contact Ginger and Derek Long at Burning Tree Productions at 919 544-6362 or

btproductions@earthlink.net

Learn about ecotours on our web page: www.durham-sanramon.org — or call (919) 489-1656

You can help: If you or an organization you are part of wishes to be involved with a third-world project, please speak with us. We offer ways to be part of our people-to-people project that suit your special needs and goals. Whether you have lots of time or only a little, lots of money or none at all, we can help you participate in a way that brings you joy and the satisfaction of caring for others.

Include me as a Durham -San Ramón Sister Communities partner. Enclosed is \$_____ to support community and economic development projects in San Ramón. A minimum contribution of \$25 (or whatever you can afford) ensures that you receive the newsletter.

Please use my donation for:

- nebulizers and other equipment for the health center
- funds to pay attendant to keep the town library open on Saturdays
- renovation of the town's dilapidated water system
- school supplies
- I would like to see a slide show
- I can supply a frequent flier certificate
- I would like to join an eco-tourist trip to San Ramón in 2003
- I have an accordion or tenor saxophone to donate

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

The Durham -San Ramón, Nicaragua, Sister Communities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Please make tax-deductible donations payable to:
Durham -San Ramón Sister Communities, 1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707

Call to get involved: (919) 489-1656

We welcome you to our meetings the 4th Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m., January through October, at the Eno River Unitarian Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham (on the left 1/2 mile from 15-501). Our mission is to strengthen awareness, friendship, and cooperation between San Ramón, Nicaragua, and Durham, NC, through people-to-people exchanges and social and economic development projects that support justice and our belief in an interdependent, one-world family.



Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities
1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707

Check out our gorgeous web page:
<http://www.durham-sanramon.org>



"Guest Houses of San Ramón"
host with tourist guest.