

**EVALUATION OF THREE MARKET BASED STRATEGIES
FOR PROMOTING ECOTOURISM IN PETÉN, GUATEMALA:
GREEN CERTIFICATION, PRIVATE RESERVES,
AND COLLABORATIVE MARKETING**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Around the world ecotourism is hailed as one of the most promising tools to foster sustainable development (Honey 1999, Southgate 1998). Conservation and development experts are especially enthusiastic because ecotourism has the potential to generate revenue for local people and simultaneously provide an incentive for protecting fragile ecosystems (Honey 1999). The Ecotourism Society has defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (Epler-Wood 1999; The Ecotourism Society 1999). Although there are myriad self-proclaimed ecotourism businesses, few achieve the Ecotourism Society’s standard (Honey 1999), and those that do may not generate the kinds of profits that investors earn from conventional tourism.²

How can legitimate ecotourism increase its market share? Market based strategies represent one important method for promoting ecotourism (Sweeting et al. 1999). The objective of this investigation is to use published sources and unstructured interviews with key informants to describe the costs and benefits of three of these strategies: green certification, private reserves, and collaborative marketing. Green certification is a means of labeling tourism services that meet certain environmental

¹ This paper is a product of the Conservation Clinic at the University of Florida. The clinic is designed to _____ and is directed by Tom Ankersen. This research was made possible by a grant from the Tropical Ecosystems Directorate of the Smithsonian Man and the Biosphere Program.

and socio-economic criteria. In theory, labeling permits consumers to express their preferences and thereby support green products such as ecotourism (Bowles et al. 1996). Private reserves are private lands that are voluntarily maintained in a condition approximating their natural state (Chacon & Castro 1999). Legal mechanisms such as conservation easements are sometimes used to insure that private reserves are protected in perpetuity. Private reserves can safeguard natural areas that are also important ecotourism attractions (Langholz 1996). Finally, collaborative marketing is a strategy where ecotourism operations share the costs and benefits of marketing in order to capture some of the economies of scale enjoyed by larger businesses (Flynn and Bonilla 1998).

In order to provide a useful context for this evaluation, each of the three strategies is discussed in relation to its potential for promoting ecotourism in Petén, Guatemala. Petén was chosen for this investigation because of its tremendous potential for ecotourism. The forests of the region are rich in biological diversity, and there are hundreds of beautiful Maya archeological sites scattered across the landscape. During the past decade, the Guatemalan Government, the United States Agency for International Development, other international donors, and a variety of non-government organizations have spent tens of millions of dollars promoting conservation and development in the region (Sundberg 1999). These efforts have been directed primarily towards establishing and maintaining the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), a protected area covering 1.6 million hectares in the Northern Petén. A small but significant proportion of the funds spent in the region has been

² This was one of the primary conclusions of investors, tourism professionals, and development experts at The Ecotourism Policy Forum (October 1999). The Forum was hosted by The Ecotourism Society and

directed towards ecotourism, e.g. Norris et al. 1998. Finally, the socioeconomic conditions in the Petén are representative of agricultural frontiers in other parts of Central America (Faris 1999) where development agencies are also promoting sustainable development through ecotourism. In each of the three sections of this article, a market based strategy is described, its costs and benefits evaluated, and the challenges of its implementation in the Petén are discussed.

II. GREEN CERTIFICATION OF ECOTOURISM

Although tourism overall is said to be growing by four percent per year, nature tourism is increasing by an incredible ten to thirty percent annually (The Ecotourism Society 1999). Ecotourism is still not clearly differentiated from nature, adventure, and wildlife tourism (Honey 1999), but these statistics suggest that ecotourism is also growing rapidly. There seems to be a never-ending debate about what constitutes real ecotourism and who does and does not practice it. In spite of the debate, there is wide recognition that the ecotourism label attracts tourists (Honey 1999). Consequently, government agencies, non-government organizations and private enterprise have begun to promote green certification systems to differentiate “ecotourism” (as each defines it) from the rest of the industry (Honey 1999). Predictably there is considerable variation in the certification standards that have been created. Differences in certification systems reflect not only divergent definitions of ecotourism but also differing objectives of the designers of certification systems (Wynn 1994). For example, certification standards may apply to small geographic regions or to the entire world. Standards may be imposed

by the tourism industry or by the government of a small Central American nation. Standards may consist of vague guidelines or strict regulations. Table 1 shows five ecotourism certification systems that apply to Central America. Although some of the international certification systems have been in operation for several years, green certification of tourism is still at the proposal stage in all of the countries in Central America except Costa Rica (Chaves 1999a).

Table 1: Ecotourism certification systems that apply to Central America

Name of certification system	Origin	Sponsor	Scale	Cost	Date Initiated	Operational Status
Audubon cooperative sanctuary system	U.S.A.	NGO / Non-Profit	Inter-national	US\$ 120	1991	Operational
Ecotel	U.S.A.	Private	Inter-national	Charges only for site visit and technical support	1994	Operational
Costa Rican Tourism Assoc.	Costa Rica	Costa Rican Institute of Tourism	Regional	Depends on size of business	1999	Operational
Alianza Verde	Guatemala	NGO / Non-profit	Regional	Depends on size of business	--	Planning stages
Green Globe	Inter-national	World Travel and Tourism Council	Inter-national	US\$ 350 – 15,000	1997	Operational

Additional information about these certification systems is available at their web sites:
 Audubon: <http:\\ www.audubonintl.org>, Ecotel: <http:\\ www.hvs-intl.com>, Costa Rica: <http:\\ www.turismo-sostenible.co.cr>, Alianza Verde: <http:\\ www.alianzaverde.org>, Green Globe: <http:\\ www.greenglobe.org>

A. Benefits of green certification

Green certification, as a market-based incentive for promoting ecotourism, is based on a simple idea: some tourists are willing to pay a premium for the knowledge that the tourism they consume is true ecotourism (Chaves 1999a). Furthermore, according to theory, ecotourism businesses fail to earn this “green premium” because tourists lack the information to identify legitimate ecotourism operations. Green certification is meant to provide the information that the consumer lacks and thereby solve this market failure. This theory has been developed extensively by

forest economists who have evaluated the potential of green certification to promote sustainable forestry (Simula 1996). The green premium is the primary economic benefit of green certification for the ecotourism business. Prestige, expectations of long term benefits, and concern for the industry, are three additional factors that may motivate ecotourism professionals to participate in green certification programs.

If successful, green certification would differentiate ecotourism from the rest of the tourism industry (Honey 1999). Differentiation would, in turn, make it possible for governments to move beyond vague endorsements of ecotourism towards hard policies that would benefit ecotourism businesses. For example, government subsidies could be directed at certified ecotourism businesses. In addition, if ecotourism professionals make the effort to become certified, they will be more likely to learn best practices and make new contacts in the industry.

In cases where a national government invests in a green certification program, benefits may accrue to the entire tourism sector of that country. For example, the publicity generated by Costa Rica's new green certification system is predicted to boost Costa Rica's already vibrant tourism industry (Escofet 1999)³. Similarly green certification could be used to promote ecotourism sites throughout the Maya Forest (Belize, Northern Guatemala, Southern Mexico), and to rejuvenate the Ruta Maya promotional campaign that attracted tourism to the area at the beginning of the decade (Garrett 1989).

³ The Costa Rican system is called the Certification in Sustainable Tourism Program (CFT), and it was created by the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT), a government agency. Implementation requires tourism businesses to fill out a survey describing four aspects of their operations: physical and biological environment, facilities, customer service, and socio-economic environment. According to their responses, the tourism facility receives a rating between 1 and 5 with 5 indicating most sustainable. The rating system is intended to boost ecotourism in Costa Rica by differentiating Costa Rican ecotourism from the rest of the industry.

Voluntary market based strategies are currently in vogue in development and environmental policy circles. For example, U.S. A.I.D. has recently sponsored a variety of international meetings and training sessions designed to promote green certification in Central America (Chaves 1999 and pers. comm.). Whether or not green certification is an effective means of promoting ecotourism, the availability of development assistance in this area is an incentive that will motivate some institutions to create certification systems.

B. Costs of green certification

The three primary costs of green certification are the transaction costs associated with forming and maintaining a certifying entity, the costs to tourism businesses of raising standards to required levels, and the opportunity cost of the capital that is dedicated to achieving green certification. Ecotourism enterprises have an economic incentive to participate in green certification to the extent that they expect the benefits of certification to exceed the costs of participation.

Governments and/or non-government organizations may subsidize some or all of these costs (See Simula [1996] for a complete discussion of the costs and benefits of certification).

C. Will green certification promote ecotourism in Petén?

1. How big is the "green premium?"

Considering that the green premium is the primary economic incentive for establishing a green certification system, it is crucial to compare the costs of green

certification with the magnitude of the premium. Forest economists have conducted this type of analysis to determine whether green certification could provide an economic incentive for adopting sustainable forestry in the tropics. Surveys of timber buyers in the United States showed that 34 percent of consumers were willing to pay 6-10 percent above market price for sustainably produced timber (Varangis et al. 1995). Some forest economists estimate that this premium is inadequate to pay the added costs of producing sustainable tropical timber (Reid and Rice 1997). Whether or not these particular calculations are correct, they provide a useful example for ecotourism experts to emulate.

Proponents of tourism certification may object to the comparison between timber and tourism. After all, the economic returns to sustainable timber harvests are more easily calculated than the returns to the diverse set of activities classified as ecotourism. Nevertheless, conservation and development experts promote ecotourism certification (e.g. Baez and Acuna 1998, and Sostenible or Naturaleza 1999) without empirical evidence for the potential benefits of certification. Although some experts express skepticism about the benefits of certification (Honey 1999; Sweeting et al. 1999), the support for certification is surprisingly strong considering the current paucity of data concerning the green premium. Knowing the magnitude of the green premium will also help to predict whether green certification systems will persist as donor support diminishes.

2. Negative effects of too many certifiers

A successful certification system must be recognized and trusted by the consumer (Chaves 1999a). When consumers are faced with a wide variety of certification systems, the green premium is bound to weaken (Chaves 1999a). Under the leadership of the Forest Stewardship Council, proponents of timber certification have been relatively successful at managing the number and quality of certifiers (Jenkins and Smith 1999). Unfortunately, this has not been the case in ecotourism where a variety of organizations appear to be developing overlapping certification systems. For example, Alianza Verde, an ecotourism organization in the Petén, is creating a certification system that will be appropriate for hotels, restaurants, and tourism operators, among others (Alianza Verde 1999). At the same time, RARE Center, a U.S. based conservation organization, is helping to facilitate the creation of The Regional Ecotourism Alliance. If the RARE project is successful, it will use green certification as a marketing tool to promote ecotourism operations in national parks throughout Central America (Jenks pers. comm.). Simultaneously, Greenglobe and Ecotel have created global-scale green certification programs that also apply to ecotourism operations in the Petén (See Table 1). If there is a premium associated with ecotourism certification, the sheer abundance of systems can be expected to confuse consumers and erode the premium.

III. INTEGRATING ECOTOURISM AND PRIVATE RESERVES

In industrialized countries private reserves are an increasingly important component of protected area systems (Bowles et al. 1996; Chacon & Castro 1999). In private reserves, land owners make a formal commitment to manage their land as

if it were a nature conservation area (Bowles et al. 1996). Private reserves are an especially attractive conservation tool when no funds are available to purchase lands directly. Conservation easements are a special form of private reserve in which property owners formally give up specific use rights to their land for a set time interval or for perpetuity (Land Trust Alliance 1990). Land owners make this sacrifice voluntarily or in exchange for some form of compensation, such as a tax break. Furthermore, conservation easements are associated with land titles. Thus, land sales do not affect the terms of easements (Chacon & Castro 1999). Ecotourism may stimulate the creation of private reserves because reserve owners can operate ecotourism businesses on private reserves, and may be entitled to pay reduced taxes (Langholz 1996). Private reserves also provide economic incentives for protecting important ecotourism sites that might otherwise be converted to other uses.

A. Benefits of private reserves

When property owners voluntarily sacrifice certain use rights to their land to make a private reserve, they are not giving up the right to turn a profit on their property. In fact, a survey of 32 of the approximately 100 private reserves in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, showed that more than half were profitable ventures (Langholz 1996). Furthermore, approximately three-quarters of respondents wrote that they earned more from their land as a private reserve than they could earn if they converted the land to another use such as logging, agriculture, or cattle ranching. Finally, according to the same survey, 67 percent of

the revenues collected by these private reserves were derived from tourism (Langholz 1996). Thus, an important economic benefit of private reserves is that owners can sell access to their land as an ecotourism attraction.

A second important benefit of private reserves relates to the rate at which they are taxed. Owners of private reserves and conservation easements may be partially or completely exempt from property taxes. In Guatemala according to the Law of Protected Areas (No. 4-89 and No. 110-96), 50 percent of profits earned on private reserves (including from ecotourism) was exempt from taxation (Chacon and Castro 1999). However, this tax break was rescinded in 1997 by the Act Cancelling tax deductions, exonerations, and exemptions.

Private reserves are a means for land owners to manage for the benefits of a jointly owned tourism attraction. The Community Baboon Sanctuary in Belize is an example of tourist attraction composed of many small private reserves. Seventy families protect forest fragments that are the habitat for a population of howler monkeys. Cooperation by the participating families guarantees the survival of the monkeys, and in turn, the monkeys are a tourist attraction and provide a small source of income for some of the families (Alexander 1999). This system of private reserves is an extremely inexpensive conservation strategy compared to the cost and complication that would have resulted had the Belizian government attempted to buy the habitat to protect the howler monkeys. On the other hand, there is a risk that the informal agreement which protects the lands will someday disintegrate and the monkey habitat will be lost.

A final important benefit of private reserves is related to the satisfaction that some property owners feel knowing that they have protected forest lands in perpetuity. Considering Langholz' (1996) result that approximately 50 percent of private reserves were not profitable, non-market benefits must be motivating the managers of some private reserves.

B. Costs of private reserves

The primary cost of creating a private reserve is the opportunity cost of the next best alternative land use. This opportunity cost is equal to the difference between the present value of revenues minus the present value of costs (present value of net revenues) that a private reserve will generate over time, and the same present value of net revenues that would be generated if the land were employed in the best alternative economic use. By definition, a private reserve has no opportunity cost if no other land use providing greater net returns over time exists. Costs of maintaining private reserves are related to the specific management requirements of the land that is protected. In many developing countries including Guatemala, forested lands are more vulnerable than agricultural lands to invasion by small-scale farmers. Any increase in a property owner's risk of losing his/her land must be factored into the decision to create a private reserve (Chacon and Castro 1999).

In many developing countries including Guatemala, forested lands are more vulnerable than agricultural lands to invasion by small-scale farmers (Jaramillo

and Kelly 1999). Any increase in a property owner's risk of losing his/her land must be factored into the decision to create a private reserve (Chacon and Castro 1999).

C. Will private reserves promote ecotourism in the Petén?

1. Tax breaks as incentives to create private reserves

Tax breaks are an important incentive for the creation of private reserves and conservation easements in industrialized countries (Bowles et al. 1996; Chacon & Castro 1999). However, in Guatemala, property taxes are only 0.2 – 0.9 percent annually and frequently go uncollected (Chacon and Castro 1999). Although the Guatemalan Peace Accords call for tax increases (United Nations 1998), the influence of Guatemalan business organizations, such as the *Comite Coordinador de Asociaciones Agricolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras (CACIF)*, has “wholly or partially thwarted four major attempts since the mid-1980s to raise the national tax coefficient” (Spence et al. 1998). There are currently no tax incentive associated with creating conservation easements or private reserves in Guatemala. Land taxes are currently so low that even if tax breaks were created, they would represent weak incentives for creating private reserves (Chacon and Castro 1999).

2. Land tenure security

Private reserves and conservation easements cannot be created unless the property of interest has a title (Chacon and Castro 1999). During the last decade, several projects have been initiated in the Petén to improve land tenure

security, but property rights are still quite ill-defined and few land owners have legal titles (Spence et al. 1998). For this reason, at this time neither private reserves nor conservation easements are a likely strategy to promote ecotourism in most areas of the Petén.

When the Guatemalan government and other organizations succeed in titling the Petén, private reserves and easements will not automatically become an appropriate conservation strategy-- land tenure security is more than just a title. In some parts of the Petén, public and private lands are invaded by small-scale farmers and large-scale cattle ranchers regardless of whether or not land is titled (Spence et al. 1998).

IV. COLLABORATIVE MARKETING OF ECOTOURISM

Some remote villages in the Petén are the proud owners of eco-camps and other ecotourism facilities (Beavers 1995a,b,c). Yet, there is a persistent concern in these villages—how can ecotourists learn about the services that the villagers are selling? (Beavers 1995a). In some cases these community ecotourism programs are developed on shoestring budgets, while in other cases, donors provide generous financing for specific activities (Beavers 1995b and 1995c). In either case, extra funds are rarely, if ever, available for marketing (Beavers 1995a). In a few exceptional cases around the world private initiatives have partnered with community ecotourism projects such that the business does the marketing and the villagers provide other services (Stronza 1999; Rodriguez 1999). However, in general “ineffective or insufficient marketing is probably the primary reason why

worthy ecotourism ventures in developing countries fail to attract visitors” (Honey 1999). One possible solution to the publicity problem is collaborative marketing--many small ecotourism projects advertise together.

A. Benefits of collaborative marketing

The most important benefit of collaborative marketing is that it permits even the smallest ecotourism ventures to benefit from advertising. In addition, collaborative marketing brings tourism professionals together and permits them to cooperate in other ways. For example, a group of small hotels that decides to advertise together may eventually sell their rooms as a block to a travel agent (Mickler pers. comm.) or form a lobbying group to influence government tourism policy. Furthermore, when tourism operations market themselves together, they may decide to create standards so that one weak operation does not tarnish the reputation of the marketing block (Ryan pers. comm.) Thus, collaborative marketing can potentially lead ecotourism operations to develop standards and improve practices.

B. Costs of collaborative marketing

Marketing is generally out of reach of small ecotourism operations because of economies of scale (Chaves 1999a, Honey 1999, Beavers 1996c). In other words, for very small firms, revenues are insufficient to cover marketing costs after the fixed costs of production have been paid. Collaborative marketing differs from normal marketing in one important way. An investment in a collaborative

marketing program promotes not only the firm that makes the investment but also other competing firms that are participating. Thus, part of each participant's marketing budget is spent to promote his/her competitors. Despite this disadvantage of collaborative marketing, small ecotourism businesses participate because their alternative is no marketing at all. As businesses develop greater and greater capacity to conduct their own marketing, they have fewer and fewer incentives to participate in collaborative ventures that subsidize their competitors.

C. Can collaborative marketing promote ecotourism in Petén?

1. Collaborative marketing has shown promising results

In 1996, ProPetén/CI, Conservation International's project in Guatemala, helped emerging ecotourism operations from several Petén communities create a collaborative marketing program. Before marketing began, ProPetén/CI helped the communities create nine well-defined ecotours and to select tourism promoters from each community. This excerpt from an article written by Flynn and Bonilla (1998) explains the marketing strategy and its impressive results:

[First,] the promoters visited 40 tour agencies, operators, hotels, and other information centers...[in Flores, the municipal capital], and distributed promotional brochures and flyers. In addition, they negotiated a 10% commission with each point of sale for every tour sold.

[Second,] the communities agreed on a weekly sales system [that operates as follows]: A promoter from one of the communities travels to Flores to organize the tours each week. The promoter collects a client list and payment from each point of sale, sells directly to walk-ins at the base of operations, organizes transportation and food, and sees the tourists off on the designated departure date. Guides who are notified via radio greet the arriving tourists in each community. Twice a month, the promoter presents a slide-show and lecture [about the ecotours] to the students of a local Spanish-language school and on selected dates to tourism and archaeology students at the regional university.

The costs for the marketing strategy are shared between the two Committees and ProPetén/CI. In addition to overall technical assistance, ProPetén/CI provides support for the promoters traveling expenses. The Committees pay a stipend to support the promoter's family during the week that he is away. In addition, the Committees and ProPetén/CI split the costs incurred by the promoter during their weeklong stay. After six months, and improved sales, CI lowered its contribution by 50%. As of January beginning, ProPetén/CI ceased providing any subsidy to the plan.

The changes brought about by this local market approach have been spectacular. After only six months, the 6 tourists that visited the routes in January 1997 turned into 41 in June 1997 and 64 in July 1997. In the month of February 1997, the Committee of Cruce Dos Aguadas sold more than they had in the entire year of 1996. By the end of 1997, the Committees showed an overall increase of 600% in sales over the previous year.

Since the work that Flynn and Bonilla (1998) describe, collaborative marketing strategy in the Petén has changed. Alianza Verde and EcoMaya are two organizations that are specifically dedicated to marketing ecotourism in the Petén. Alianza Verde is a representative organization with several full-time employees. Members of Alianza Verde come from the tourism sector, the Guatemalan government, ecotourism committees from several communities, and from NGOs with tourism initiatives (Flynn and Bonilla 1998). Alianza Verde is a non-profit organization whose objective is to maximize the ecological and socio-economic benefits of ecotourism in protected areas by promoting best practices in the regional tourism industry and through effective marketing (Chaves 1999b). In 1999, Alianza Verde received approximately \$ 30,000 from U.S. AID (PROARCA / CAPAS) to develop a green certification program in the Petén. Alianza Verde was created after a forum entitled, "Diagnostico sobre el Turismo en la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya" which was funded by ProPetén/CI (Chaves 1999b). Notably, many of the key

players who helped to create Alianza Verde were employees of ProPetén/CI or other conservation and development organizations.

EcoMaya also helps to market ecotourism in the Petén, but using different strategies than those of Alianza Verde. EcoMaya is a for-profit organization with 5 full-time employees (Demaza, pers. comm.). Stock in EcoMaya is owned by tourism committees in eight rural communities and by ProPetén/CI. ProPetén/CI owns over half of the stock, and therefore has a controlling interest in EcoMaya. ProPetén/CI takes most of the financial risks with regard to EcoMaya, and therefore maintains a strong influence over EcoMaya's business strategy (Flynn pers. comm.). EcoMaya pays for ecotourism marketing by taking a percentage of all tours sold, just as any travel agent would (Demaza pers. comm.). Community ecotourism operations are now selling tours through EcoMaya instead of marketing their tours as Flynn and Bonilla (1998) described. In order to attract customers and supplement their income, EcoMaya also sells bus and airplane tickets, classes at nearby Spanish language schools, tourist information, and even buys and sells dollars. The margin that EcoMaya earns from marketing the Spanish language schools provides the greatest source of revenue for EcoMaya (Demaza pers. comm.). EcoMaya was initiated with a loan from ProPetén/CI. Although EcoMaya was intended to receive no subsidies, a micro-enterprise expert paid by ProPetén/CI is currently managing certain aspects of EcoMaya's day to day business operations (Flynn pers. comm.).

2. Collaborative marketing: market solution or subsidy?

EcoMaya appears to provide a market-based solution to one of the most serious obstacles to community ecotourism development—marketing. However, EcoMaya's interests are not identical to the interests of the communities. For example, while EcoMaya as a business may have an economic incentive to market only a few of the best ecotours, each participating community will insist that its tours be promoted. This and other similar tradeoffs will become increasingly difficult to resolve as competition increases in the ecotourism sector, and EcoMaya must struggle to stay afloat. For the time being, financial and institutional support from ProPetén/CI softens the impact of market forces on what is essentially an experiment in ecotourism marketing. Since EcoMaya is receiving support from ProPetén/CI, it is important to evaluate the opportunity costs of the capital used to create a business like EcoMaya. Could the same capital be used more efficiently by a non-government organization or by the communities themselves in order to generate the same results? A tourism expert from The Nature Conservancy commented that he has difficulty imagining how community collaborative marketing programs will generate sufficient revenues to sustain themselves (Drumm pers. comm.).

Alianza Verde presents a striking contrast to EcoMaya. As a non-profit organization, Alianza Verde relies on grants and contributions from its members in order to pursue its ecotourism objectives. Much of Alianza Verde's success will be determined by its capacity to mobilize Petén's emerging ecotourism businesses. These struggling businesses cannot be expected to be very generous with Alianza Verde. In contrast, aid agencies represent an important source of potential funding

for Alianza Verde. Will Alianza Verde's priorities remain focused on the needs of the membership, or will the allure of grants shift Alianza Verde's focus to conservation and development fads? If EcoMaya and Alianza Verde are successful, they will have complementary impacts on ecotourism development. EcoMaya will promote the interests of specific community projects while Alianza Verde will promote the broader interests of Petén's entire ecotourism sector. Both organizations are young and relatively untried; a close look at accomplishments of these organizations several years down the line will reveal the ways in which citizens' groups and businesses can contribute to ecotourism development in the region.

3. *Collaborative marketing works best for homogeneous businesses*

Collaborative marketing requires more than just trust and good communication among participants. A marketing specialist working at Conservation International notes that participants must accept that collaborative marketing will benefit some ecotourism operations more than others (Ryan pers. comm.). For example, a tiny ecotourism business with no funds for marketing will get a tremendous benefit from a little publicity. However, a larger business that might have paid for some of its own marketing, has less to gain from collaborative marketing. Will the larger business gain more from the collaboration or would it have gained more by investing in its own publicity campaign? It may be a close call. Marketing cooperatives work best when the participant businesses are roughly the same size and at the same stage of business development (Ryan pers. comm.). In some ways the participants in EcoMaya are a good example of homogenous

businesses since they are all small businesses from rural communities. Of course homogeneity is relative; none of the ecotourism committees would be mistaken for the senior management of a five star hotel. On the other hand, each ecotourism committee has its own distinct strengths and weaknesses (Ryan pers. comm.) EcoMaya will be most successful if it can take into account the diverse and sometimes conflicting interests of the communities that it represents.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The three market-based strategies reviewed in this article differ in their potential to promote ecotourism in the Petén. All are works in progress. Insecure land tenure is currently a serious obstacle to the creation of private reserves in many areas of the Petén. Green certification may eventually benefit ecotourism by differentiating it from the rest of the tourism industry. However, the abundance of certification systems may erode consumer confidence in any single certification system. It is puzzling that certification is promoted even though no one has attempted to estimate the size of the green premium. Finally, collaborative marketing is the only one of the three strategies to have produced tangible benefits for ecotourism operations in the Petén. Although these three market-based strategies have been evaluated separately, they are not mutually exclusive. Green certification and collaborative marketing may be especially compatible because green certification may someday be used to market ecotourism businesses.

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EVALUACION DE TRES ESTRATEGIAS DE MERCADEO PARA LA PROMOCION DEL
ECOTURISMO EN EL PETEN, GUATEMALA: CERTIFICACION VERDE,
RESERVAS PRIVADAS Y MERCADEO COLABORATIVO.

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RESUMEN

El gobierno y las organizaciones no gubernamentales que trabajan en El Petén han tenido un éxito relativo en sus esfuerzos por promover el desarrollo ecoturístico. El objetivo de este reporte es la revisión de fuentes publicadas y entrevistas no estructuradas con informantes clave para identificar los costos y beneficios de tres estrategias mercadológicas destinadas a la promoción del ecoturismo en la región: la certificación verde, el mercadeo colaborativo y las reservas privadas.

El principal beneficio de la certificación verde es que incrementa la recaudación de aquellas operaciones ecoturísticas mediante su distinción del resto de la oferta turística. Los tres mayores costos que conlleva la certificación verde son: gastos de transacción inherentes a la formación y mantenimiento de una entidad de certificación, inversiones destinadas a elevar los estándares de las empresas ecoturísticas a los niveles requeridos, y el costo oportunistico del capital dedicado a obtener la certificación verde. Las empresas ecoturísticas sienten un incentivo económico para participar en la certificación verde en la medida en que confíen en que los beneficios de poseer dicha certificación excederán los costos de participación. A pesar de que varias organizaciones están actualmente promoviendo la certificación verde en El Petén, las operaciones ecoturísticas carecen de la información suficiente para tomar la decisión de participar o no.

Las reservas privadas, incluyendo la servidumbre ecológica, constituyen una proporción creciente de las áreas protegidas en los países industrializados. Desde el punto de vista conservacionista, las servidumbres ecológicas son una forma de reserva privada particularmente segura, ya que no pueden ser desarrolladas fácilmente por los propietarios de los terrenos. Estudios publicados indican que en los países en vías de desarrollo, el ecoturismo es la fuente primordial de ingresos para las reservas privadas. Sin embargo, hasta que no aumente la seguridad en la tenencia de la tierra en El Petén, las reservas privadas no podrán ser una estrategia efectiva para la promoción del ecoturismo.

La principal ventaja del mercadeo colaborativo es que permite anunciarse a pequeñas operaciones ecoturísticas, algo que normalmente no podrían hacer debido a sus relativamente bajos ingresos. En sentido general, a medida que las operaciones ecoturísticas aumentan de tamaño, el incentivo para participar en iniciativas de mercadeo colaborativo disminuye. Hay indicaciones de que el mercadeo colaborativo de pequeñas operaciones ecoturísticas podría ser una estrategia exitosa para promover el ecoturismo en El Petén.