

Proposed Project

Experiential Learning International (ELI) is a non-profit organization based in Denver, Colorado that partners with organizations around the world to provide opportunities for volunteers, professionals and interns to work in communities around the globe to make a difference. Through ELI's affiliation with Cuerpos de Conservación (CCY), I will be working in Sabacché, Yucatán to implement a community development project. CCY is a non-profit organization with sixteen years of experience working on programs aimed at natural resource conservation and community improvement in the Yucatan Peninsula region. CCY is an organization dedicated to developing sustainable development for indigenous groups and minorities in the Yucatan region. Their work is aimed to improve life conditions and preserve the environment in the villages, implementing social services, environmental education, sustainable infrastructure and direct work with the community. The organization is composed of professionals who volunteer in their spare time to donate their talent, work and resources to projects aimed at strengthening the skills and capabilities of rural groups and communities, especially those located in regions of very high social marginalization. I will be involved in their conservation and environmental restoration program which uses practice-oriented activities to rescue, conserve, restore and manage Mexico's natural resources.

Description of Community Service

Sabacché is a very small community in Yucatán with approximately 180 people. Sabacché isn't a major tourist destination, and travelers passing through the area usually go to the more well-known destinations such as Chichen-Itza and Merida. Sabacché is advertised as a small-scale, community-based tourist location offering two cenotes, limestone sinkholes that are filled with water, that tourists can swim and snorkel in with archeological sites close-by.

The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, a federal government body in Mexico, has been helping people all over México with various types of projects depending on the region. One of the programs is called Alternative Tourism Programs in Indigenous Zones. Eight eco-tourism groups in Yucatán have joined together under the banner "Aventura Maya" of which Sabacché is a member as part of the Alternative Tourism Program. Once the proposed projects are approved, money is given for infrastructure and training (service, promotion, business management, etc.), and a study is done to see if the idea is viable from the safety, accessibility, and visibility point of view.

Since Sabacché is such a small community, the government and local NGO's are working to draw tourists into this lesser-known town to bring money into the local economy. Ecotourism is intended to help small communities find more lucrative ways to make a living, learning new skills and improving green tourism options at the same time.

I will be working in this Mayan community for three months from approximately June 8th to September 8th. During my stay, I will help the community to design an efficient process to receive visitors. Also, I will apply different, environmentally-friendly techniques for tourism at the site which will be developed according to the Mexican Standards for Ecotourism. Some of

the projects at this site involve water management, waste management, energy efficiency, environmental education, and information for visitors. In addition to my responsibilities concerning the ecotourism project, I will teach a couple hours of English and culture to the youth population in the community every week.

My major goal for the ecotourism project is to ensure that the project is serving to empower the local community. Since tourism provides financial gains to the community, it is important that all of the community members are receiving benefits from the utilization of a shared natural resource. Also, I would like to help the community to appropriately use the incoming flow of money to develop other projects that will improve the overall well-being of its members such as education and other infrastructure. I can use methods of facilitating discussions among community members to determine if the project I am involved in is really meeting their needs and goals.

The ecotourism project will enable me to have real-world experience in my area of concentration of sustainable development. My career goal is to help developing countries to utilize the natural resources available to them to take advantage of the global market to improve the economic well-being of poor communities. However, as part of the development of those communities, I want to ensure that the resources are utilized in a way that is sustainable and won't harm or degrade the surrounding environment which would ultimately reverse the progress that was made.