

Press Release

Seefeld, 4th March 2015
No. 3/2015
7633 char.

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TO DO! 2014: Winners from Costa Rica, India and Uzbekistan

The 20th Award Ceremony of the International Contest for Socially Responsible Tourism took place at this year's ITB Berlin on 4th March 2015, at 2.30 pm on the stage in hall 4.1.

ACTUAR – the Association for Rural Community-Based Tourism in **Costa Rica**, the slum tour operator **Reality Tours & Travel** at India's large city Mumbai and the „Mitan Responsible Tourism Project“ of the travel agency **Silk Road Destinations** in **Uzbekistan** are the winners of the TO DO! 2014.

Participation and Sustainability

The tourism projects awarded with the TO DO! 2014 share similar objectives: to improve people's living conditions by carefully developing tourism services in a planned manner, to create alternative sources of income and strengthen self-awareness of local culture and traditions. The most important criterion for the award is the participation of the local population in the planning and implementation of all the tourism related projects. This establishes a special connection between participation, social responsibility and sustainability.

The laudatory speech of this year was held by Hans-Joachim Fuchtel, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Costa Rica

ACTUAR, the Costa Rican Association of Rural Community Based Tourism, was founded in 2001 as a non-profit organisation upon the initiative of indigenous groups, peasants' organisations and women's organisations. Their objective has been to support local development efforts in rural areas by marketing and qualifying alternative tourism projects. In order to achieve this objective, a central head office was set up in San José which works at two levels. On the one hand, they promote rural de-

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velopment and strengthen cultural identity. This happens through consulting for the development and implementation of sustainable tourism projects and regular training programmes. On the other hand, the products and services are being marketed by a travel and incoming agency founded specifically for this purpose. The members of ACTUAR were supported by the United Nations Development Programme in building touristic infrastructure.

Today, ACTUAR is a network of 34 communities in different parts of the country. Their tourism projects fit well into everyday life in rural areas and are organised and implemented by the local population. Alternative sources of income and new perspectives are created for the villagers, land ownership is secured and natural resources are preserved and protected. When visiting the rural or indigenous communities, travellers get to know an authentic Costa Rica with its culture and traditions and come in direct contact with the local population. www.actuarcostarica.com

India

Reality Tours & Travel (RTT) organises tours to the less privileged parts of Mumbai – the so-called slums. The population is strongly involved in the development and implementation of the tours and a major part of the income directly benefits the slum dwellers, e.g. in terms of vocational training. RTT was founded in 2005 by Chris Way from the UK and Krishna Pujari from India. In Mumbai, the two of them began by sharing their concept with people in Dharavi. After detailed discussions on the opportunities and obstacles of slum tourism, the first tours were conducted.

With qualified local tour guides trained for the job by RTT, the company tries to give tourists a realistic picture of the situation and living conditions in a slum. Through personal experiences and encounters, the tourists get impressions of everyday life. The slum dwellers, in turn, also benefit from the tours, not just financially. The tourists' interest in their work lives and living environments has a positive influence on their self-confidence. In 2009, the sister organisation Reality Gives was founded in addition in order to provide training in health and hygiene, but also English and computer classes – upon the wish of the people of Dharavi. Without such skills, there is hardly any possibility for advancement in Indian society. 80 percent of RTT's profit is invested into the local development projects of Reality Gives. www.realitytoursandtravel.com

Uzbekistan

In the remote Uzbek village of Mitan, the incoming tour operator **Silk Road Destinations – C.A.T.I.A.** has set up the community-based project **“Mitan Responsible Tourism Project“**. This project gives guests the opportunity to come in direct contact with the local families and their Muslim culture and tradition. The objectives are to generate an additional income for the villagers and to contribute to cultural exchange



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and understanding between people of different social and religious backgrounds. The project does not affect the usual life of the villagers with its economically important processes, but gives them opportunities to enhance their own knowledge through intercultural exchange. In this context, special emphasis is placed in the involvement of young people.

Mitan is a small village in the Uzbek steppe and cannot boast of tourist attractions. But it offers travellers the opportunity to come in direct contact with the local population. The warm hospitality of the villagers contributes to that, as well as their openness and readiness to allow strangers to authentically take part in their lives for a short while. The guests get the opportunity to deal with the typical realities of the country. Silk Road Destinations and the people of Mitan managed to initiate a tourism project aimed at participation in which today many villagers have a part. www.silkroaddestinations.com

On behalf of the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism (SST), a supporting member and sponsor of the prize money for the TO DO! contest, board president Hansjörg Ruf said in his speech: "This year's TO-DO! winners accentuate the concerns of our foundation in an excellent manner: Solidarity in tourism, dignity and social cooperation, combined with planning for a sustainable future. With the prize money for the TO DO! winners, we would this year again like to express our appreciation for the work accomplished so far."

Dr. Dietlind von Laßberg, vice chairperson of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e. V.), said on the occasion of the award ceremony on 4th March: "This year's winners have impressed me not only because of their courageous and creative commitment to socially responsible, participatory and sustainable tourism. What pleases me in particular is the fact that strengthening the self-esteem of the local people involved is at the heart of their project activities."

All three TO DO! winners provide successful examples of sustainable achievements of socially responsible concepts, especially through the intensive involvement of the local population in the development of tourism. Therefore, they are examples of best practice for other tourism destinations. The three winners are given one TO DO! trophy each. The Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism supports the projects with an additional 5,000 Swiss Francs each, meaning to support the further development of the projects.



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The TO DO! Contest Socially Responsible Tourism is supported by the Engagement Global / German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as well as by Bread for the World - Church Development Service / Tourism Watch , forum anders reisen, ITB Berlin, the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism (SST) and Studiosus Reisen München GmbH.

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