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EDITORIAL
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**TOURISM IN THE PACIFIC COAST OF COSTA RICA: AN
ANALYSIS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND
TOURISM IN THE COSTA RICAN PACIFIC REGION: A SUPPLY
AND DEMAND ANALYSIS**

Susan Chen Mok

Key words

Tourism, pacific, supply, demand, tourism activities, recreation, Costa Rica.

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Summary

In recent years, tourism has been an important source of foreign exchange for the country, as well as a generator of income for rural communities with tourist attractions. This paper presents a description and analysis of the existing tourism supply and demand in the Costa Rican Pacific region, which allows visualizing the strengths and weaknesses of the situation of the tourism sector and proposing lines of action, as well as giving some recommendations to help solve the problems found or to deepen more specific research. It is based on data obtained from the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, the National System of Conservation Areas and other secondary sources.

Abstract

In recent years, Tourism has been an important source of income for the country as a whole as well as the specific rural communities that possess tourist attractions. We present a description and analysis of the existing tourism supply and demand in the Costa Rican Pacific region. This work permits to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the tourism trade, and proposes a line of action and provides recommendations to contribute to resolve the identified problems or recommendations for specific areas for further research. This work uses data collected by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, the National System of Area Conservation, and other secondary sources of data.

CURRENT SITUATION OF TOURISM IN COSTA RICA

In the past decade, there has been a rapid growth of beach hotels and vacation homes in the Costa Rican Pacific, mainly linked to the U.S. market. This enclave tourism, as Cordero & Van Duynen (2002) call it, and residential tourism, respectively, along with cruise ship tourism are transforming the physical landscape and displacing or competing for resources with fishing, farming and ranching communities in the coastal zone (Honey, Vargas, & Durham, 2010, p. 2).

On the other hand, we also find tourism that exploits the country's natural beauty: ecotourism, adventure tourism and rural community-based tourism, generally referred to as "ecotourism", which has less impact on the environment and the physical landscape than enclave tourism and is beginning to develop centered on an important network of protected wildlife areas, public and private sites and a relatively good infrastructure.

Beginning in the 1990s, the development of tourism began to generate more foreign exchange than the export of bananas and coffee, becoming, in the last decade, the country's main source of foreign exchange.

According to Costa Rica's National Sustainable Tourism Plan 2010-2016 (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2010), Costa Rica's tourism performance has been competitive, as it has maintained a significant flow of tourists despite the crisis experienced in 2008 and 2009, which affected Costa Rica's main source market.

Figure 1 shows the behavior of international tourist arrivals from 1988 to 2011. An increasing trend is observed, with only three moments of decline: 1996, 2002 and 2009.

The annual growth percentage of the number of international tourists entering the country in the period 1988-2012 shows a positive performance, with the exception of the years 1996, 2002 and 2009 as can be seen in Figure 2.

Tables 1 and 2 show Costa Rica's main tourism indicators and their annual percentage variation, which reflect the country's performance in this area from 2000 to 2009.

This increase in the number of tourists is also reflected in the growth in the amount of foreign exchange received by the country, with an upward trend since 2002 and a slight decrease in 2009, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. The drop in 2009 is due, among other reasons, to the crisis experienced in 2008 and 2009, which significantly affected the United States, the main country that brings visitors to Costa Rica. However, Figure 3 shows that since 2009 there has been a constant growth and that in 2012, foreign exchange income has reached

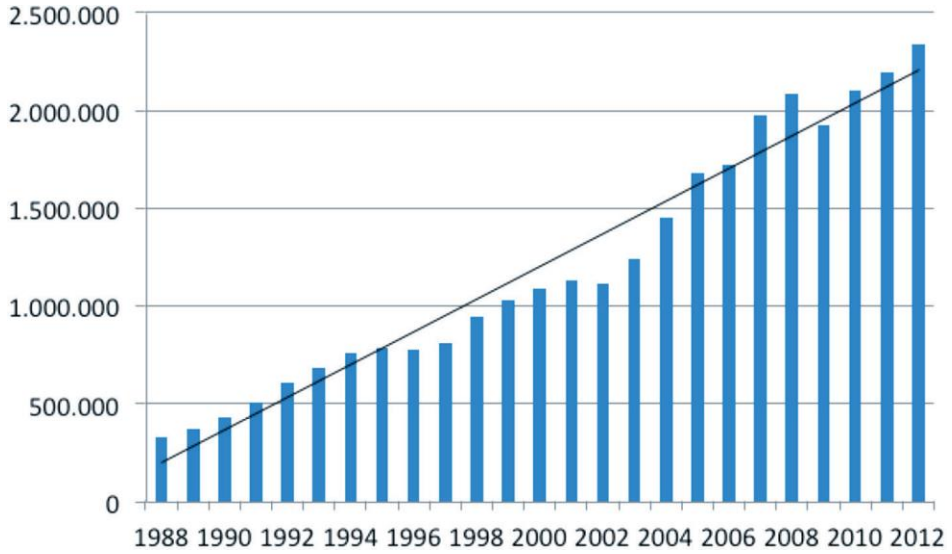
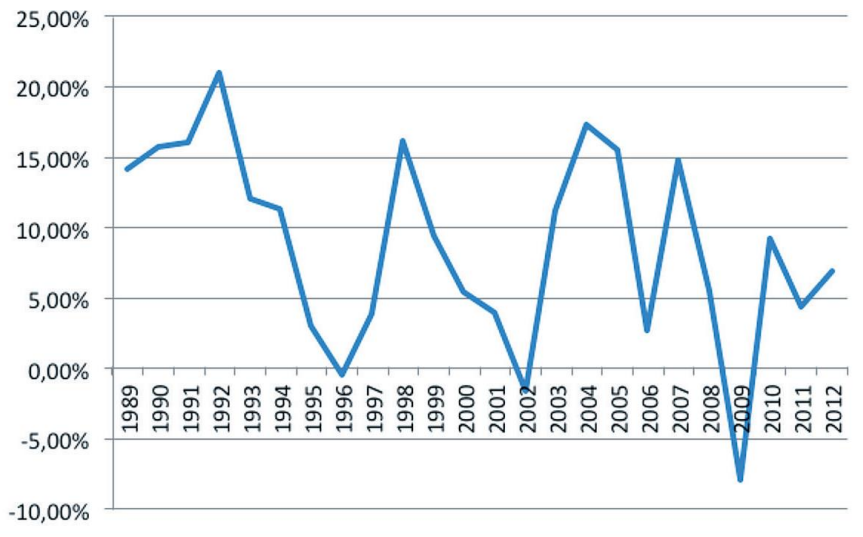


Figure 1. International tourist arrivals, 1988-2012.

Source: Own elaboration with data from yearbooks (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 1988-2012).



Percentage annual variation in international tourist arrivals, 1989-2012.

Source: prepared by the authors based on yearbook data (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 1988-2012).

only slightly higher than in 2008. However, in terms of the number of tourists, Figure 1 shows that as of 2010, the number of visitors began to exceed the number of people who entered the country in 2008. This shows a recovery of the tourism economy and a greater number of excursionists coming to the country, but spending less money.

Table 1
TOURISM INDICATORS FOR COSTA RICA, 2000-2009

INDICATOR	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
Tourists (thousands)	1088	1131	1113	1239	1453	1679	1725	1980	2089	1923
Currencies (US\$ millions), nominal value	1229,2	1095,5	1078	1199,4	1358,5	1570,1	1620,9	1927,4	2174,1	1977,8
Approved investment (US\$ millions), nominal value	38,1	47,7	172,9	59,8	56,2	143,6	154,9	259,1	696,8	102,2
Room offer	29497	31706	33126	35003	36299	38737	40811	41340	41759	42058
Cruise ships (number of ships)		195	146	202	215	192	237	216	238	253
Cruise ship visitors (thousands)		189	276	318		346	322	320	366	

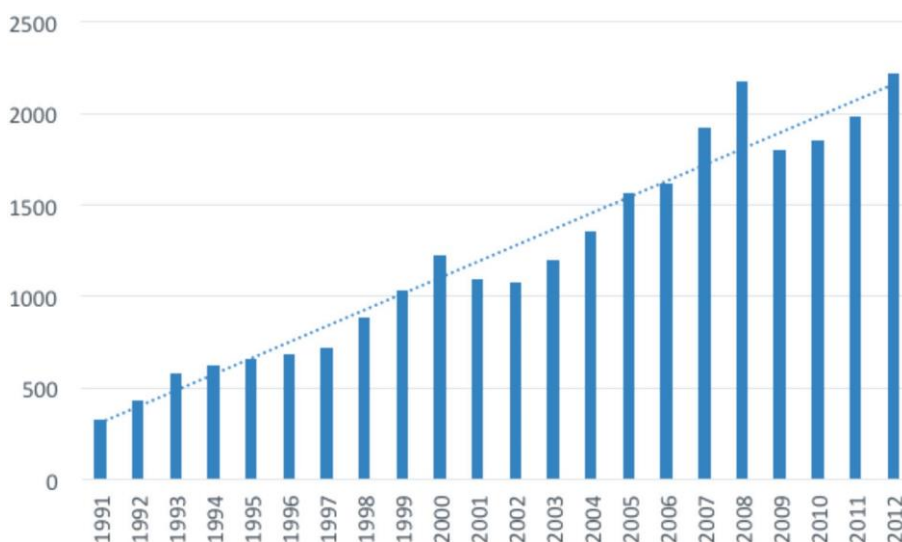
Note: Source: (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 2010, p. 5).

On the other hand, comparing Costa Rica's data with the other Central American countries, including Panama, and not counting excursionist tourists entering through cruise ships, Costa Rica retains the advantage in attracting tourists, from 2009 to 2012 (Barquero, 2013, p. 29A).

Table 2
PERCENTAGE ANNUAL VARIATION OF TOURISM INDICATORS IN
COSTA RICA, 2000-2009

INDICATOR	2000	2001		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
Tourists (thousands)	5,4%	4,0%	-1,6%	11,3%	17,3%	15,6%	2,7%	14,8%	5,5%	-7,9%
Currencies (US\$ millions)	18,6%	-10,9%	-1,6%	11,3%	13,3%	15,6%	3,2%	18,9%	12,8%	-9,0%
Approved investment (US\$ millions)	50,6%	25,2%	262,5%	-65,4%	-6,0%	155,5%	7,9%	67,3%	168,9%	-85,3%
Room offer	2,3%	7,5%	4,5%	5,7%	3,7%	6,7%	5,4%	1,3%	1,0%	0,7%
Cruise ships (number of ships)	-21,3%	-2,0%	-25,1%	38,4%	6,4%	-10,7%	23,4%	-8,9%	10,2%	6,3%
Cruise ship visitors (thousands)	-19,1%	-0,5%	17,5%	24,3%	15,2%	-11,9%	23,6%	-6,9%	-0,6%	14,4%

Note: Source: (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 2010, p. 5).



Foreign exchange from tourism in US\$ millions, 1991-2012.

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the Yearbooks.

(Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 1991-2012). Data in nominal value.

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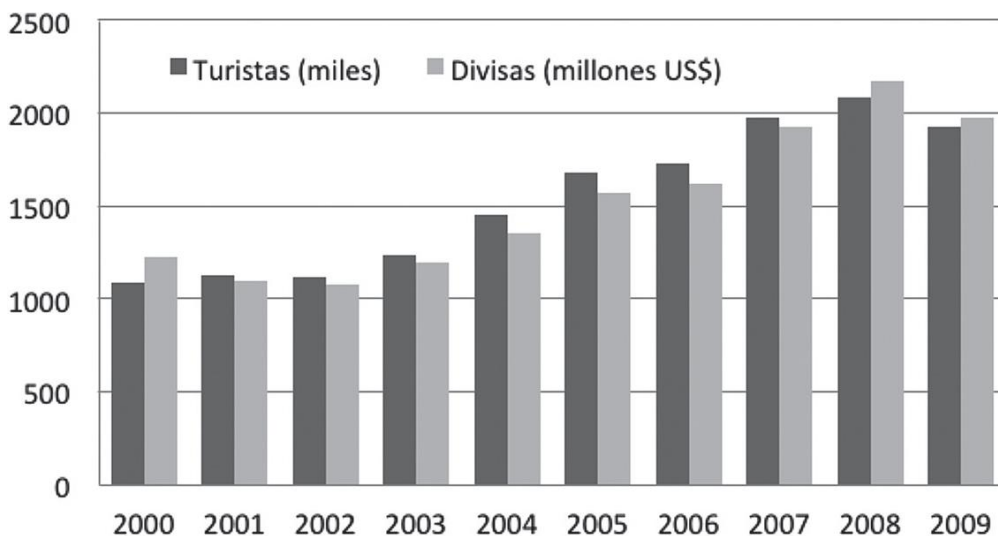


Figure 4. Foreign Exchange Earnings vs. tourist arrivals, 2000-2009.

Source: Own elaboration with data from the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (2010). Data in nominal value.

CURRENT EFFORTS

The Costa Rican government has made great efforts to promote international tourism in the country, and despite the global crisis experienced in 2008 and 2009, which caused Costa Rica's tourism indicators to fall, there has been a clear rebound since 2010.

Among the activities carried out for this purpose is the agreement between the five Central American countries to attract international tourism and mobilize Central Americans among them.

In 2012, an intra-regional tourism promotion campaign was launched with the participation of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Belize. It is a joint campaign promoted by the governments and TACA Airlines that includes promotions on airfares and vacation packages (Summa, 2012). On April 18, 2013, it was announced that TACA Airlines, the Ministries of Tourism of five Central American countries, the chambers of tourism grouped in Fedecatur, SICA (Central American Integration Secretariat), tourism wholesalers and tourism service providers in the region are promoting the "Discover Central America" program, with an investment of \$200,000 (La Nación, 2013).

On the other hand, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute has carried out the promotional campaign "Costa Rica without artificial ingredients" to promote the country as a destination of natural scenic beauties and to attract the lovers of

nature, as well as offering natural destinations for recreation and relaxation in harmony with the environment.

In addition, this government agency has been promoting, since 2012, national tourism with a very strong campaign called "Vamos a Turis-tear" for residents to go out and visit the country's tourist sites at any time of the year, with special offers from hotel companies. This campaign is an initiative of the Institute in conjunction with the National Chamber of Rural Tourism, the Costa Rican Chamber of Hotels and the Association of Tour Operators (Brenes, 2013). According to Brenes (2013), local tourism is carried out by 2.3 million people according to ICT data. On average, each family takes two vacations and on each occasion spends about two hundred and fifty thousand colones.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC COAST OF COSTA RICA

According to the study by Honey, Vargas & Durham (2010, p. 19), the Pacific Coast was characterized, in the first half of the 20th century, as being made up of rural towns dedicated to agriculture, livestock and fishing. The communities were isolated, with poor communications to the main roads or other towns. Banana exports were made through the ports of Golfito and Quepos; and Puntarenas was the main port for exporting and importing other products. Puntarenas was reached by railroad and then by vehicles through roads.

The railroad had boosted tourism in Puntarenas from 1910 to 1940 and the completion of the Inter-American Highway in 1946 encouraged it even more (Marín and Viales, 2012, p. 185), (Chen and García, 2010, p. 28). Between the 1960s and 1970s some Costa Ricans built vacation homes on the Pacific coast, although at that time access to this area was still very limited. Some towns could only be accessed by ferry, due to the lack of bridges over some rivers (Honey, Vargas, and Durham, 2010, p. 19). However, as early as 1840, foreign commercial elites essential to the port and also nationals began to erect ostentatious houses. Twenty-three structures considered heritage in the city of Puntarenas were built between 1901 and 1950 (Marín and Viales, 2012, p. 179).

In addition, in the late 1960s, the creation of the National System of Conservation Areas placed large portions of territory under protection, including extensive regions of the Pacific Coast: Santa Rosa National Park, Las Baulas Marine Park, Tamarindo Wildlife Refuge, Camaronal Wildlife Refuge, Ostional Wildlife Refuge, Carara National Park,

Cabo Blanco Absolute Reserve, Manuel Antonio National Park, Ballena Marine Park and Corcovado National Park.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Inter-American Highway and improved roads connected communities in the Guanacaste coastal zone, such as Playa del Coco, Conchal, Hermosa and Brasilito. In 1978 the first section of the construction of the Costanera Sur opened access to Jacó and Quepos. The construction of roads and bridges continued until connecting Quepos with Dominical and the southern zone, giving better access to these regions, which favored tourism and real estate development in the area (TT Argos, 2013, pp. VI-10). In the North Pacific, in the late 1970s, the Polo Turístico Golfo de Papagayo project along with the Daniel Oduber airport in Liberia were part of a government strategy to bring economic benefits to Guanacaste, through international "resort" tourism (Honey, Vargas, and Durham, 2010, p. 19) or enclave tourism, as Cordero and Van Duynen (2002) call it.

In 1984, the United Fruit Company withdrew from Golfito and abandoned banana production in the Pacific, leaving many families unemployed and causing a crisis in the area, from which it has not been able to recover (Clare, 2005, p. 341). Currently, the population is mainly engaged in the agriculture and livestock, tourism and commerce sectors (TT Argos, 2013, pp. VI-27).

According to Blanco (2012, p. 289), starting in the first half of the 1980s, the country incorporated as State policies a series of neoliberal measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These measures meant the restructuring of the state apparatus and the economic-productive system and implied the reduction of the state payroll and the privatization of public enterprises, as well as increased support to the tertiary sector, restructuring the agricultural sector and initiating the opening of the economy.

The restructuring of production changed the destination of production incentives, giving priority to the agro-export sector for non-traditional products and reducing resources for traditional products, such as basic grains and foodstuffs for local consumption. This stimulated the incursion of many of these producers into other activities, such as tourism, to improve their income and ensure the subsistence of their families. Given the above, at the end of the 20th century Guanacaste underwent a rapid transition from an economy based on agriculture to one centered on services for tourism.

Table 3 and Figure 5 show the infrastructural development of 12 localities in 5 tourism planning units, selected on the basis of their tourism and residential development, as of the date of the study, or according to expected growth.

Table 3
TERRITORY DEDICATED TO HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND TOURISM,
PACIFIC COAST, 1980-2005

TOURISM PLANNING UNIT	LOCATION OF THE CASE STUDIES	1980 (HA)	1998 (HA)	2005 (HA)
	Papagayo-El Coco	62,38	434,85	726,79
North Guanacaste	Potrero-Flamingo-Brasilito	31,05	266,67	418,24
	Playa Grande-Tamarindo	22,47	246,85	837,61
	Samara-Punta Islita	56,94	224,77	544,34
Guanacaste South	Malpaís-Montezuma	13,15	7,52	32,24
	Paquera	12,77	11,23	23,16
Puntarenas and Gulf Islands	Puntarenas-Caldera	726,38	1291,03	1724,84
	Horseshoe-Jacó	78,98	268,34	415,92
Central Pacific	Quepos-Manuel Antonio	190,98	301,5	297,46
	Sunday-Tortuga	10,56	50,05	43,98
South Pacific	Golfito	184,43	200,05	215,52
	Puerto Jimenez	25,67	88,54	101,96

Note: Source: Own elaboration with TT Argos 2009 data cited by Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010, p. 22).

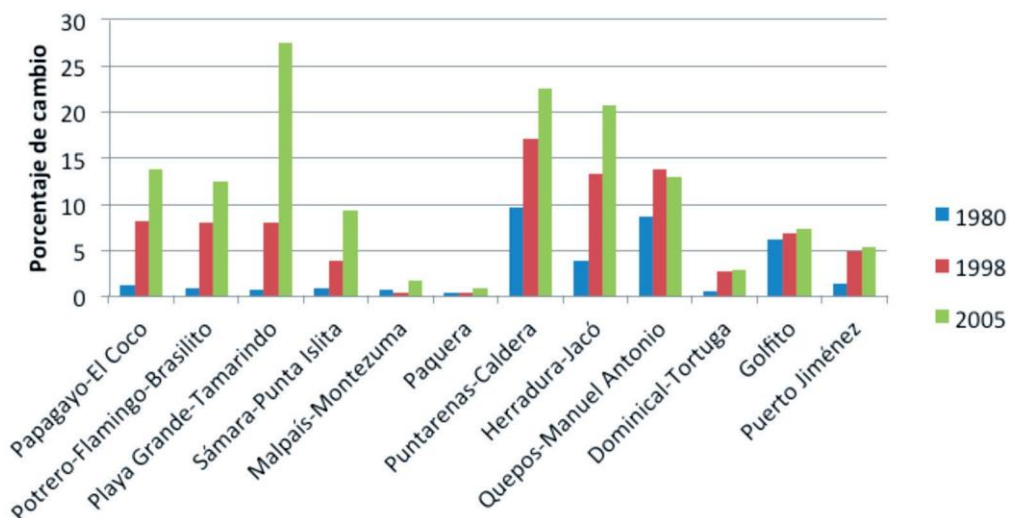


Figure 5. Percentage change in land use for human settlement and tourism.

Source: Own elaboration with TT Argos 2009 data cited by Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010, p. 22).

The data in Table 3 and Figure 5 show the growth in land use change in Playa Grande-Tamarindo, Puntarenas-Caldera and Herradura-Jacó, places where there has been a significant development of tourist infrastructure and housing, the latter due to the increase in residential housing as a result of tourism development in the area.

Playa Grande-Tamarino went from less than 1% of the land use dedicated to human settlements and tourism in 1980 to 27.5% in 2005. This was due to the growth of investments in hotels, vacation homes, condominiums and tourism businesses. The same is observed in Puntarenas-Caldera and Herradura-Jacó, as well as in the rest of the localities of the Guanacaste coast, where in 1980 the percentage of land use for human settlements and tourism is very low and then increases in 2005.

This development contrasts with the localities of Malpaís-Montezuma, Paquera, Domatical-Tortuga, Golfito and Puerto Jiménez, where land use change is very low. In the cases of the South Pacific zones (Domatical-Tortuga, Golfito and Puerto Jiménez), this small increase is due to the fact that large territories are under protection, in addition to the lack of infrastructure (paved roads, international airport, rural electrification, etc.) required for large-scale tourism and the implementation of residential projects.

From 2005 to 2007, 26 of the 48 districts along the Pacific Coast accounted for 92.3% of new coastal construction. In Liberia, Tamarindo, Sardinal and Jacó, construction increased by 12.2%, compared to the percentage in 2005.

of all new construction nationwide, and 49.8% of all construction on the Pacific Coast. Apart from protected areas, few areas of the Pacific Coast remain intact, unaffected by this real estate development (Honey, Vargas, and Durham, 2010, p. 50).

The districts of the Central and Northern Pacific are the ones that received the greatest foreign investment in real estate at a national level, between 2004 and 2007, among them we find: Santa Cruz, Puntarenas, Carrillo, Golfito, Nicoya, Tilarán, Garabito, Aguirre, Pérez Zeledón and Bagaces, in that order from highest to lowest. It is clarified that these foreign investments do not only correspond to the development of coastal hotels such as: Los Sueños Marriott, Reserva Conchal, Hacienda Pinilla, JW Marriott, Four Season, Hilton and Hyatt; there is also a growing trend towards the purchase by foreigners of properties for housing use, land, condominiums, villas, commercial establishments, among others.

Additionally, data from 2006 and 2007 show that the cantons of Osa and Golfito, belonging to the South Pacific, are among the areas with the highest increase in the construction of new infrastructure works (TT Argos, 2013, pp. VI-11) during these years.

EVOLUTION OF THE DEMAND FOR TOURISM ACTIVITIES

The following graph shows visitation to the country's protected wildlife areas, broken down by region. As can be seen, the Pacific areas show a constant growth, with a drop in the number of visits in 2005, but then recovering and continuing to rise. Unlike the other regions, which show several years with declines in the level of visitation. The Central Valley has four drops in the period corresponding to the years 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2009. The Caribbean has two drops in 2005 and 2009 and the North shows a decrease in visitation in 2006, 2007 and 2009. The above shows an increase in tourists' preference for visiting areas in the Pacific region, surpassing the Central Valley as of 2006.

It is important to note that, as of 2010, the National System of Conservation Areas changed the form of administration of protected wild areas from Planning Units to Conservation Areas. Figure 6 shows four major regions. The Pacific was established for the study as corresponding to the planning units of Guanacaste North, Guanacaste South, Middle Pacific, South Pacific, Puntarenas and Gulf Islands, and Monteverde. The Caribbean corresponds to the Caribe Norte and Caribe Sur planning units. The Northern region corresponds to the Northern Plains, and finally the Central Valley is the planning unit of the same name.

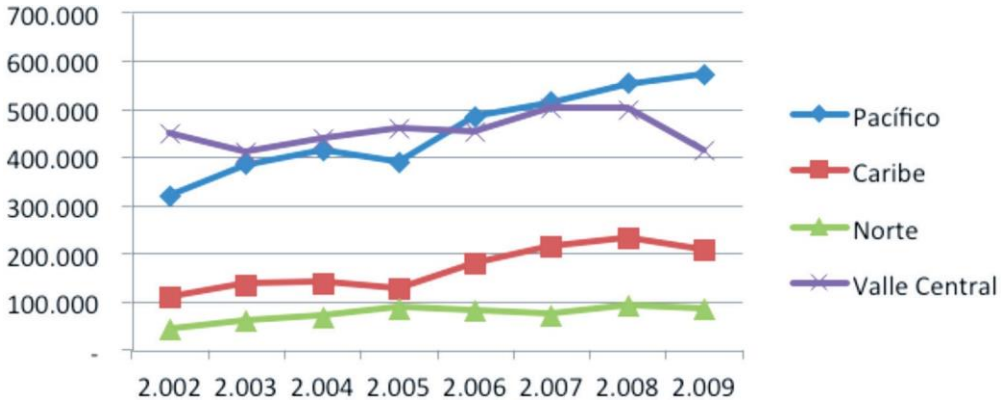


Figure 6. Visits to protected wildlife areas, 2002-2009.

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the National System of Conservation Areas (2011).

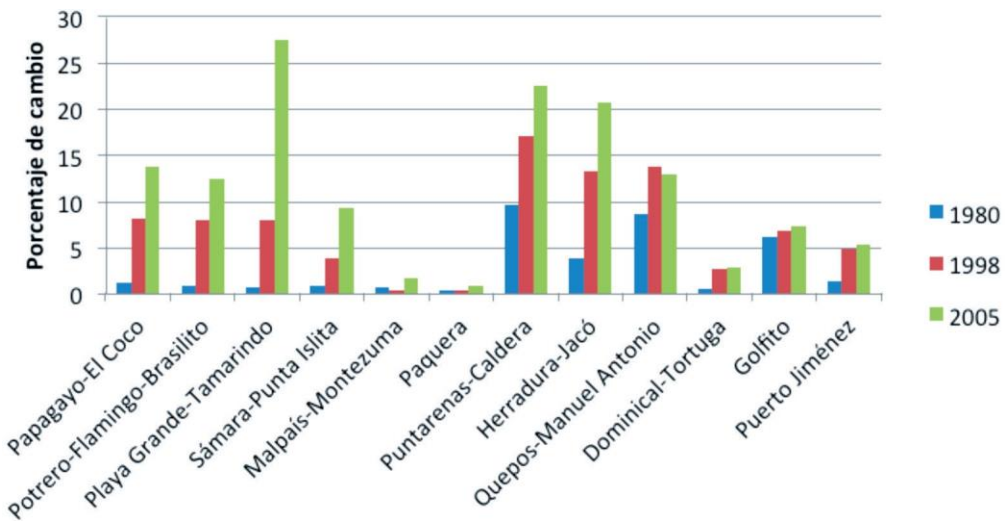


Figure 7. Visitation to Costa Rica's protected wildlife areas, 2010-2012. Source:

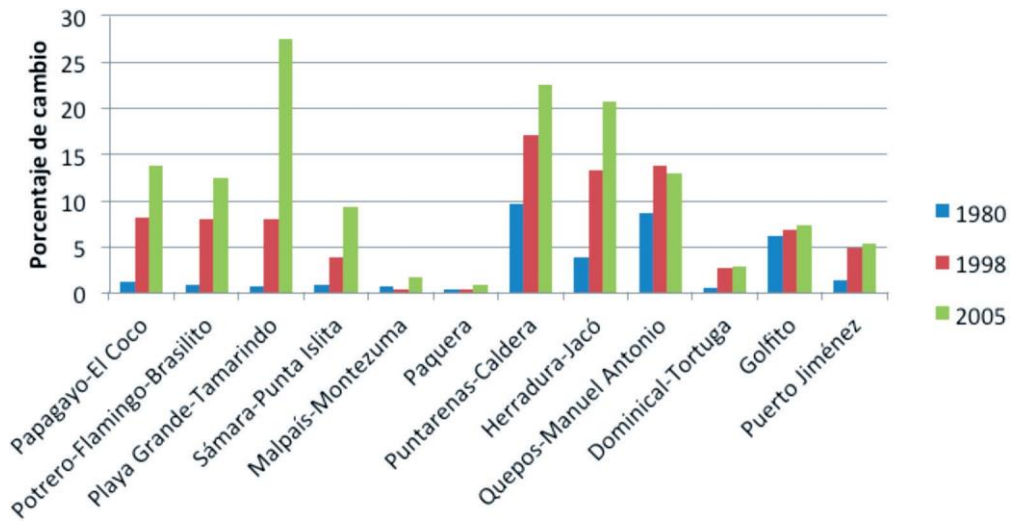
Own elaboration with data from Pavlotzky and Rojas (2010), (2011) and (2012).

Figure 7 corresponds to the period from 2010 to 2012, during which the designation of the zones indicated was modified. In this case, the Pacific region corresponds to the conservation areas listed in Table 7.

Figure 7 shows the visitation to the protected wildlife areas from 2010 to 2012 and clearly shows that the Pacific and Central Valley protected areas are increasing, the latter always below the figure presented in the Pacific. The

visitation from the other two Caribbean regions and Huetar Norte increased in 2011 and decreased again in 2012.

It should be noted at this point that the Pacific region covers a larger area of Costa Rican territory, so the comparison may not be fair. But what can be said is that there is a greater taste of tourists to visit the Pacific areas, and among these there is a preference for the areas of the Central Pacific, as shown in Figure 8.



Visitation to Costa Rica's Pacific protected areas by conservation area, 2010-2012.

Source: Own elaboration with data from Pavlotzky and Rojas (2010), (2011) and (2012).

The acronyms used in Figure 8 are detailed in Table 7, which lists the protected wilderness areas of the conservation areas of the Pacific region.

However, the low visitation to the South Pacific region is not only to the protected wildlife areas, but also to the entire area in general, as community leaders and local stakeholders in the southern sector of the country state.

For Costa Ricans (TT Argos, 2013, pp. VI-46), the South Pacific is perceived as an inhospitable place, with only two known centers of attraction: Paso Canoas (border with Panama) and the banana port of Golfito. Trips to the South Pacific were motivated by the opportunity to buy consumer products at lower prices in Paso Canoas and the banana port of Golfito. Visits to the latter were further promoted with the creation of the Golfito Free Warehouse, allowing Costa Rican families to purchase goods without paying taxes.

national. It was not until the coastal road was improved and nature-based tourism increased that the South Pacific was promoted as an ecotourism destination, and new activities such as whale watching, dolphin watching and scuba diving are now offered.

Despite this new boom in ecotourism activities in the area, local leaders and stakeholders say that the South Pacific area has little influx of tourists due to limited infrastructure and services, in addition to the fact that access to national parks is restricted (Jara, 2012). For this reason, the ICT presented the National Tourism Development Plan for the South Pacific, with the objective of diagnosing the conditions of the region in terms of tourism and promoting experiential tourism, so that visitors can interact with local customs.

CRUISE TOURISM

Figure 9 shows the number of cruise ship visitors to Pacific ports. It can be seen that from 1997 to 2000 there was an increase in the number of visitors. Beginning in 2001, there was a considerable decrease, which coincided with the upturn in the number of cruise ship visitors to the Caribbean. From 2002 onwards there is a growing trend, which is always lower than the number entering the Caribbean (Chen, 2013, p. 71), and in 2012 the figure exceeds the number of tourists who entered these ports in 1997, in addition to surpassing the visits to the Caribbean, as can be seen in Figure 10.

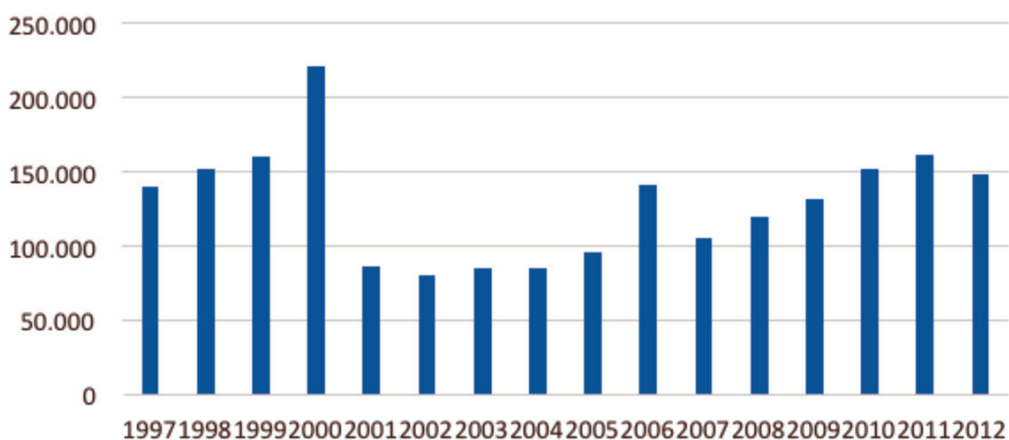


Figure 9. Entry of excursionists through the ports: Puntarenas, Caldera and Golfito. Source: prepared by the authors with data from the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo Yearbooks (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 1988-2012).

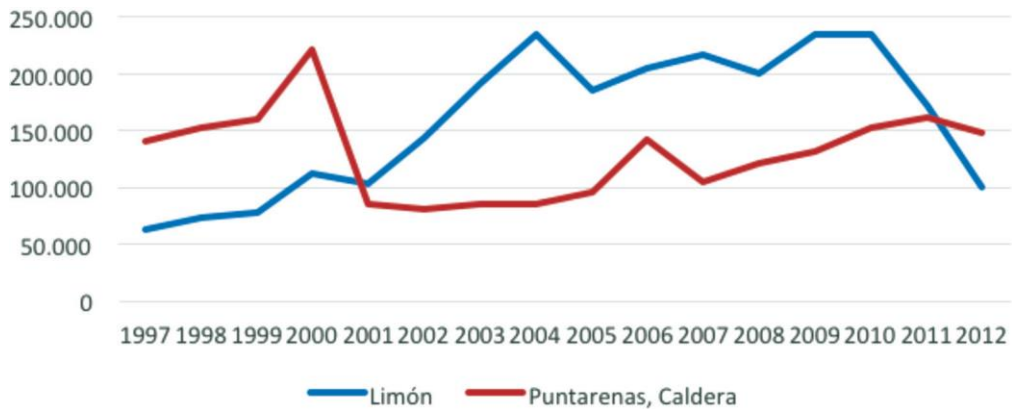


Figure 10. Tourist arrivals by cruise ship by port, 1997-2012.

Source: Own elaboration with data from the Yearbooks of the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (1988-2012).

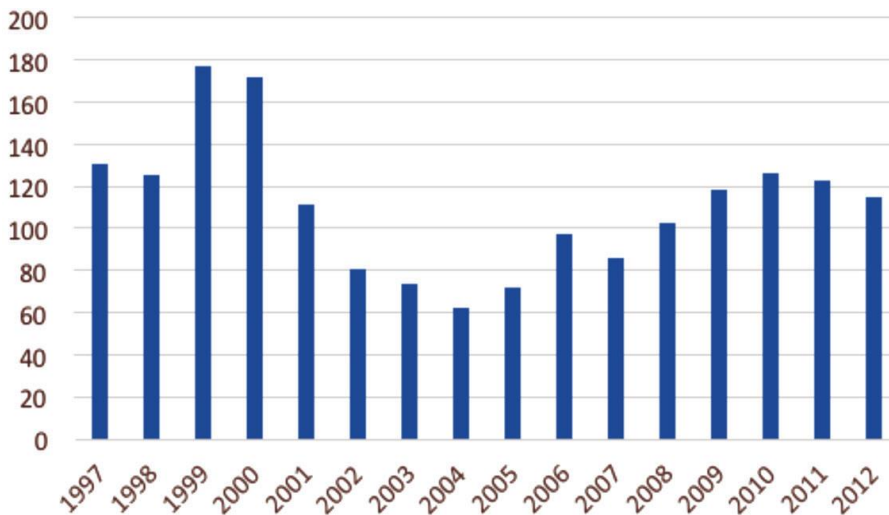


Figure 11. Cruise ship arrivals in the ports of Puntarenas, Caldera and Golfito, 1997-2012.

Source: prepared by the authors with data from the Yearbooks of the (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 1988-2012) (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 1988-2012).

Figure 11 shows the number of cruise ships docking in the ports of Puntarenas, Caldera and Golfito. There was an upward trend until 2000, after which the number decreased until 2004, when the figure reached 62 cruise ships. Then the upward trend began again, increasing the number of cruise ships docking in Pacific ports from 62 in 2004 to 123 in 2011. This growth in the number of cruise ships is also reflected in the increase in the number of excursionists arriving at these ports, as can be seen in the following table.

However, as of 2011, the number of cruise ships does not exceed the number that entered the country in 1997.

However, despite the data on cruise ship excursionist income to Pacific ports, most of them come with tour packages purchased on board, which are managed by large operators, and with contracts acquired through the cruise lines, which receive a large percentage of the fees (Honey, Vargas and Durham, 2010, p. 62). These tour packages include other sites outside of Puntarenas, so the major benefit of this tourism does not stay in the port city or its surroundings (Mora, 2013, p. 109). Despite this, small merchants in the port (restaurants, art shops, street vendors, etc.) consider that their income increases modestly and that what is sold most are liquor products, tobacco, and handicrafts as souvenirs of the trip. Food products are not sold because the cruise includes food (Mora, 2013, p. 101).

Caldera has been a port used primarily for cargo, but it has also been used for the docking of cruise ships. However, the area is somewhat remote from population centers that offer the necessary services required by tourists. Cruise ships arrive and their occupants immediately enter the buses that will take them to the previously purchased tours (Honey, Vargas and Durham, 2010, p. 62).

The port of Golfito is not included in the latest National Development Plan for the Pacific Region as a destination for cruise ship tourism. Nevertheless, Golfito has received cruise ships, but has not been an important destination for them (Honey, Vargas and Durham, 2010, p. 62).

According to Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010, p. 63), cruise ship tourism has had a very low positive economic impact for Puntarenas and Caldera and for Costa Rica in general.

TOURISM ACTIVITIES

According to the National Sustainable Tourism Plan, the activities carried out by tourists during their stay in the country are shown in Table 4.

It is important to note in this table the diversification of the tastes of tourists, considering a wide range of tourist activities not only sun and beach. This is in contrast to the period from 1950 to 1970, in which Puntarenas was consolidated as a tourist destination for national and international visitors (a condition that was maintained for a short period, when access to other sites little intervened by man, such as Jacó and Playas del Coco, improved).

The government took advantage of this situation to promote economic growth with little investment through the design of more efficient marketing strategies, with little diversification of the tourism offer. From 1970 to 1995, tourism development was based on the growth of the activity, but not on diversification (Marín and Viales, 2012, p. 188).

Table 4

ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY TOURISTS, 2006-2010

TOURIST ACTIVITY	AVERAGE 2006-2010
Sun and beach	77%
Flora and fauna observation	52%
Walks	45%
Shopping	37%
Bird watching	35%
Canopy	32%
Thermal waters	26%
Visit to volcanoes	
Surf	20%
Snorkel	16%
Visiting relatives	12%
Learn Spanish	11.6%
Horseback Riding	11%
Museums and theaters	11%
Quick	9%
Kayak	
Diving	5%
Fishing	5%
Suspension bridges	5%
Dolphins and whales	5%
Honeymoon	5%
Quadricycles	
Visit rural community	
Mountain biking	

Note: Source: (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 2010, p. 14).

According to Vargas (2003, p. 5), during this period tourism was concentrated in the Central Valley with specific destinations in the center of the country, such as the Irazú and Poás volcanoes; and the Central Pacific, towards Puntarenas, and to a lesser extent, Jacó. Among the reasons for these preferences are the lack of adequate road distribution, scarce coverage of service infrastructure to serve tourists in areas with tourism potential, lack of entrepreneurial vision, and lack of well-planned government policies to consider the development of the activity.

In the period indicated in the table, 2006-2010, it can be seen that today's visitors demand new tourist activities, always related to nature, but no longer only "sun and beach".

Villalobos, Galdeano and Tolón (2009, p. 76) conducted an analysis of the demand intention of international tourists for "nature tourism", according to socio-demographic variables and travel conditions. The study of the Costa Rican Tourism Institute is based on data from the Air Survey of the first quarter of 2007, applied to non-resident tourists over 18 years of age who departed from the Juan Santamaría airport, and includes the following modalities: hiking on trails, visiting volcanoes, flora and fauna observation, bird watching and canopy. It was found that the conditions: traveling with family, traveling as a couple and the tourist's origin have a potential favorable influence on the intention to demand most of these activities. The results allow outlining a strategy to guide policies and actions in nature tourism in the country. Among its conclusions and recommendations are the following (p.97):

- The attributes of national nature do not seem to be sufficient for the country's tourism positioning.
- Canopy tours, bird watching, volcano visits, and hiking trails are the nature tourism activities most likely to be demanded by tourists arriving in the country as families, couples, or those with more than a master's degree. Despite the significant percentage of these types of tourists, the country needs a strategy to position national nature tourism in these market segments.
- Tourists from Latin America and the Caribbean show a high interest in volcanoes, while those from Europe aspire to observe flora and fauna in general, and birds in particular. One strategy for companies involved in such activities would be to find out about the preferences of these tourists in order to offer them tailor-made packages.

- Among other factors that could be negatively impacting the advantages of nature tourism are: distance, rates, environmental and biodiversity management, security, information, infrastructure, transportation and tourist services. In the case of parks and nature reserves, this trend is reinforced.
- For visitors aged 50 and over, the country has to develop an offer of such activities appropriate in terms of space, conditions and opportunities.
- A strategy is needed to encourage the female segment to engage in at least one nature tourism activity, which directly drives the demand for flora/fauna and volcanoes, while favorably influencing the demand for hiking trails, canopy tours and bird watching through families, couples, married couples and friends. Women are a key generator of multiplier effects through these market nuclei.
- It is necessary to improve the conditions and opportunities for supply in the different areas where it is generated. Such is the case of the reserves and national parks, where it is possible for tourists to engage in at least one of the activities in question. Thirty-three percent of those interviewed said that they did not visit these areas, so there is potential to favor the development of such activities. In addition, 34.5% of tourists who have 'already been' to the country could take the opportunity to do at least one nature tourism activity, perhaps one that they had not done on their previous trip.

TOURISM OFFER IN THE PACIFIC REGION OF COSTA RICA

The following graphs show the evolution of the number of companies with tourism certification in Puntarenas and Guanacaste, considering that these two provinces cover the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.

The following table shows the number of rooms with a tourism declaration offered in these two provinces; the data for the years 2006 to 2008 are not shown because they were not disaggregated by province, as in the rest of the years. It can be observed that there is an increasing trend with small decreases in the years 1998, 2002 and 2011 for Puntarenas. For Guanacaste, the trend is increasing with a significant increase in the housing supply as of

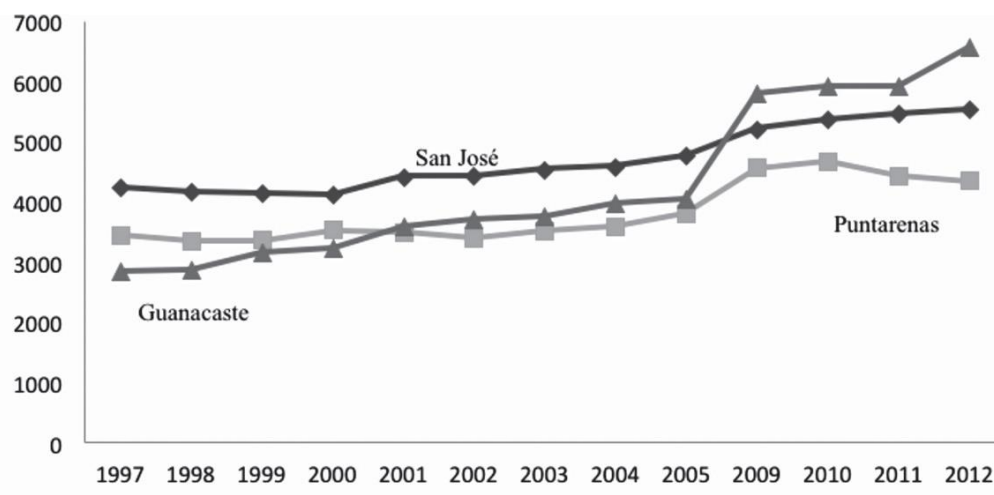


Figure 12. Rooms with tourism declaration in San José, Puntarenas and Guanacaste, 1997-2012. Source: Own elaboration with data from the Yearbooks of the (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 1988-2012).

from the year 2005. In the case of San José, the capital city, from 1997 to 2000, the trend was downward, and from that year onward there was a slight but steady increase until 2012.

Only the data for these three provinces, Puntarenas and Guanacaste, which together constitute the Pacific areas of Costa Rica, are plotted and contrasted with the capital San José, to compare their evolution. These three provinces contain the largest number of housing supply in the country for the study period. And it is observed that the housing supply of Guanacaste is higher than the supply of Puntarenas as of 2001, which also exceeds the supply of San José as of 2009, according to Figure 12.

Here we can make a very general disaggregation in such a way that the data from Guanacaste are considered as the data for the North Pacific. And the Puntarenas data for the Central and South Pacific.

In addition to the housing supply, the behavior over the years of the supply of other services can be observed, with a tourism declaration, such as: travel agencies, water transportation, gastronomic companies, vehicle rental and lodging companies. It is shown that lodging companies have the largest offer, according to Figure 14 (separated in a separate graph to better observe the data of the other tourist service offers) and vehicle rental companies have the smallest, according to Figure 13.

Figure 13 also shows that the supply of water transportation has a downward trend from 1997 to 2011. The supply of companies

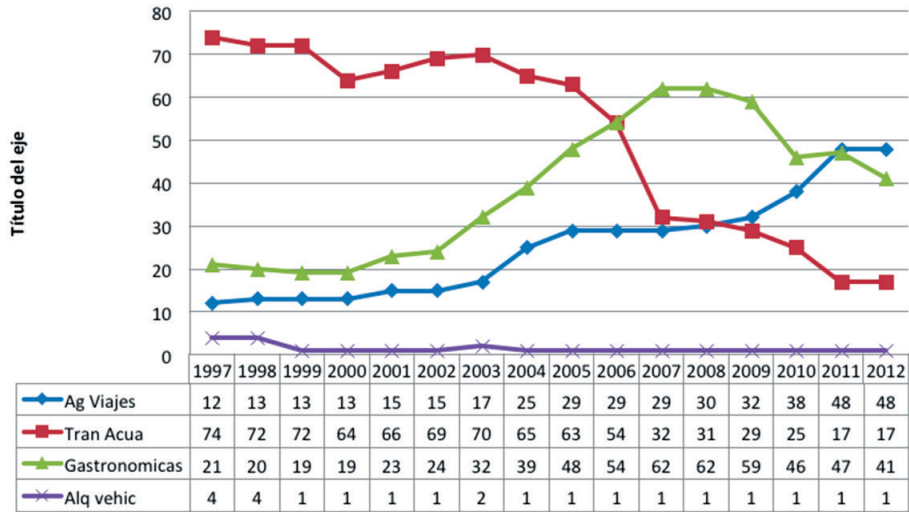


Figure 13. Companies with tourism certification in Puntarenas and Guanacaste, 1997-2012.

Source: Own elaboration with data from the Yearbooks of
(Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 1988-2012).

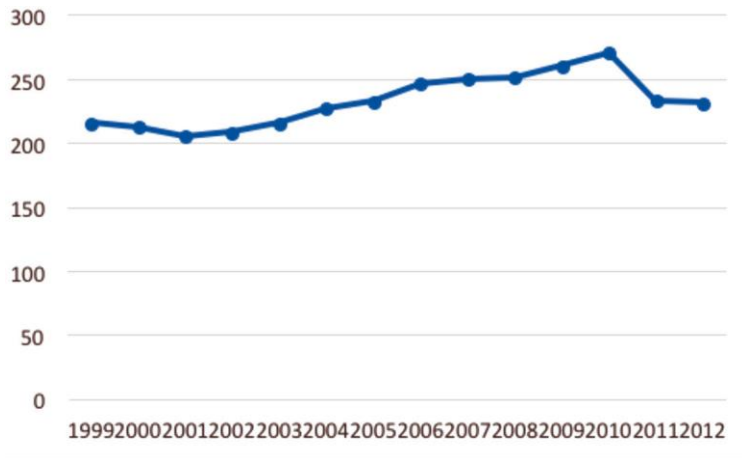


Figure 14. Lodging companies in Puntarenas and Guanacaste, 1999-2012.

Source: Own elaboration with data from the Yearbooks of
(Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 1988-2012).

The number of gastronomic establishments has an upward trend until 2008, after which it began to decline. The number of travel agencies has an increasing trend throughout the study period.

In the case of the supply of lodging companies, Figure 14, from 1999 to 2001 the tendency is downward, from this year until 2010 there is a constant and sustained growth. From 2010 onwards, it began to decrease again.

According to Figures 13 and 14, practically and in general, the number of tourism businesses (lodging, food, water transportation, vehicle rental) have a downward or stable trend in recent years, except for travel agencies. This has not affected the entry of foreign tourists, since, on the contrary, it has increased in recent years, according to the data shown in Figure 1.

Costa Rica's tourism offer has increased enormously in recent years through a great diversity of activities and forms of tourism. Another classification that we can associate is the distinction of the offer according to the following definitions of tourism: enclave, rural community, adventure and ecological.

The following sections detail the range of tourism activities available in the Pacific region of Costa Rica, according to the above classification.

It should be noted that tourism activities cannot be pigeonholed into a specific category, i.e., there are activities that are practiced in two or more tourism categories indistinctly, for example: ecological and rural tourism or in enclave tourism and adventure tourism; or in enclave tourism, ecological tourism and rural tourism, in a combined manner.

COMMUNITY-BASED RURAL TOURISM

Rural community-based tourism consists of tourism experiences that are planned and sustainably integrated into the rural environment and developed by local people, organized for the benefit of the community (Actuar, 2013).

The six defining characteristics are:

1. It integrates the natural wealth and the daily life of the rural community.
2. Promotes sustainable productive practices within the tourism offer.

3. The tourist experience is adapted to the rural dynamics and preserves the peculiarity, rusticity, as well as the cozy and comfortable atmosphere that characterize the rurality of the country.
4. It is based on local management and participation and strengthens the organization in which several families or the entire community participate.
5. It integrates the local population into this business activity, distributes the benefits equitably and supplements the income of rural families.
6. Promotes land tenure by local people (Actuar, 2013).

Within this definition of rural tourism and observing the tourism activities offered, there is a mix of activities that are also practiced in ecotourism and adventure tourism. What makes the difference is that these types of activities are offered by community and local organizations, in which several families or the entire community participate.

In this sense, there are offers of activities such as the following:

- Bird watching
- Flora and fauna observation
- Dolphin and whale watching
- Diving and snorkeling
- Bathing in waterfalls
- Horseback transportation
- Boat transportation
- Walks
- Bicycle ride
- Visit to the mangroves

- Natural mud spa
- Observation and practice of artisanal processes: rope fishing, mollusk extraction, trapiche, organic agriculture, medicinal plants, coffee processing.
- Workshops on environmental education and conservation, history and tradition
- Enjoy traditional foods and local culture
- Tours in indigenous communities

Rural tourism offers can be found in all three regions of the Pacific.

ADVENTURE TOURISM

Adventure tourism is defined by Executive Decree 31095 MEIC-TUR of March 31, 2003 as "those recreational activities that involve a level of physical-sports skills with identified risk and in direct contact with nature" (Ministerio de Economía Industria y Comercio, 2003, p. 1). The following activities fall into this category: "Canopy" (sliding between trees on cables), "sky walk" or "sky trek" (walking on hanging bridges), "bungee jumping" (jumping into the void attached to a rope), "while water rafting" (rafting in rivers), scuba diving, "rappel" (descent with ropes), climbing, mountain biking, kayaking in rivers or sea, horseback riding, hiking (one or several days in mountains, caves, canyons).

This type of tourism involves a certain amount of risk, requires minimal training or preparation and appropriate equipment for the practice of the activity.

The main objective of adventure tourism is to promote adventure activities in nature. It consists of visiting or staying in areas where the so-called adventure sports or active tourism can be developed.

Adventure tourism can also be classified according to its difficulty: low, moderate or high. In the adventure tourism trips, it is implicit to know places, their people and their culture in an active and participative way.

Table 5 presents an overview of the adventure tourism activities that can be found in the Pacific region of Costa Rica.

Table 5
ADVENTURE TOURISM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	NORTH PACIFIC	CENTRAL PACIFIC	SOUTHERN PACIFIC
Canopy	x	x	x
Diving	x	x	x
Climbing wall	x	x	
Snorkeling	x	x	x
Rafting	x	x	x
Surf	x	x	x
Kayak		x	x
Canyoning or cave descents	x		x
Tree climbing			x
Rapel		x	x
Parapentium		x	
Bungee		x	
Canoes	x	x	x
Safary	x		
Suspension bridges		x	
Bicycles	x	x	
Fishing	x	x	x
Horseback riding	x	x	x
Cable Car		x	
Walks	x	x	x

Note: Source: Own elaboration with research data.

ECOLOGICAL TOURISM

According to Rojas (2006), ecological tourism or ecotourism is "the environmentally responsible form of tourism consisting of traveling to or visiting natural areas relatively undisturbed, in order to enjoy, appreciate and study the natural attractions of these areas, as well as any cultural manifestations (present and past) that may be found there.

The International Ecotourism Society (1990) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and enhances the well-being of local people. According to (Honey, 1999, p. 22) ecotourism should follow the following seven principles, both for those who operate the services and for those who participate:

1. Minimize the negative environmental and community impacts generated by the activity.
2. Building respect and environmental and cultural awareness.
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
5. Provide financial benefits and strengthen participation in local community decision-making.
6. Create sensitivity to the political, environmental and social climate of the host countries.
7. Support universal human rights and labor laws.

Table 6 shows the ecotourism activities offered in the three Pacific regions.

This type of tourism experience has the virtue of being "a process that promotes conservation, has a low negative environmental and cultural impact, and fosters an active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local populations" (Rojas, 2006).

They can be practiced in the areas of the National Conservation System, which are classified as: biological reserves, national parks, forest reserves,

wildlife refuges, protected areas and wetlands. But they are also carried out in other public areas such as beaches, rivers and waterfalls; or in territories of private investment and organization. Moreover, as can be seen, these activities are practically the same as those offered by organizations that promote rural community-based tourism, since the principles and objectives of this type of tourism are very similar to those of ecotourism.

On the other hand, it is important to note that protected areas are not only suitable for ecotourism, but many adventure tourism activities also take place within these zones, such as surfing, snorkeling and horseback riding on some beaches, descending and hiking in caves, among others.

Table 6
ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	NORTH PACIFIC	CENTRAL PACIFIC	SOUTHERN PACIFIC
Observation of architectural and historical sites	x	x	x
Food tasting	x	x	x
Bird watching	x	x	x
Diving	x	x	x
Purchase of handicrafts	x	x	x
Flora and fauna observation	x	x	x
Thermal waters	x		x
Whale and dolphin watching		x	x
Walks	x	x	x
Beaches, rivers, waterfalls	x	x	x
Camp	x	x	x
Snorkeling	x	x	x
Horseback riding tour	x	x	x
Bicycle	x	x	x
*Activities with low impact on nature and the environment			

Note: Source: Own elaboration with research data.

ENCLAVE TOURISM

The "enclave" model is characterized by large-scale tourism location, dominated especially by transnational tourism capital. This type of tourist development generates a considerable amount of employment, while at the same time it is attributed important cultural consequences such as the annulment of local identities. And, in terms of its environmental consequences, major alterations have been attributed to it, due to modifications in the natural environment and high energy and water demands (Cordero and Van Duynen, 2002).

Costa Rica has not escaped this type of tourism development, mainly in the Guanacaste area, characterized by large tourist complexes or megaprojects with huge investments in physical infrastructure and an artificial design of the tourist destination (Lizano, 1998).

This type of development concentrates the visitor within the hotel facilities, offers multiple activities for fun and relaxation, and provides all the services they may desire or need. It has been strongly developed in the North Pacific region, where more than thirteen large hotel infrastructure projects can be counted throughout the Guanacaste area. In the Central Pacific, at least eleven projects of this type can be counted, without being exhaustive. These hotel complexes are the basis of enclave tourism. In the South Pacific, existing hotel developments are smaller in scale and only offer lodging and some other basic services for tourists traveling to the area, so they cannot be classified as enclave tourism, according to the definition given by Cordero and Van Duynen (2002).

Some developments that favor enclave tourism are shown in Table 7.

These resorts offer tourist activities such as kayaking, horseback riding, boat tours, hiking on artificial trails, recreational fishing, diving, and yet skiing. In other words, the same activities can be found within the tourist complex, without having to leave the area to hire them.

Unlike the North and Central Pacific, the real estate development in the South Pacific area, as a result of the tourist awakening caused by the opening of the South Waterfront, has not caused major impacts on nature, because from the beginning, most of the projects aimed to offer comfort in harmony with the environment, so the developments were small and did not violate the landscape or the environment, unlike the large projects in the North and Central Pacific (TT Argos, 2013, pp. VI-11).

Table 7**HOTELS THAT FAVOR ENCLAVE TOURISM**

NORTH PACIFIC	CENTRAL PACIFIC
Riu Guanacaste	Double Tree Resorte Hilton Puntarenas
Barceló Tambor	Terraza del Pacífico
Barceló Langosta	Best Western Jaco
Hilton Papagayo Resort & Spa	Beach Villa Caletas
Occidental Allegro Papagayo	Villa Lapas
Riu Palace	Punta Leona
Western Playa Conchal	The Dreams by Marriott
Willas Sol	Issimo Boutique Hotel & Spa
Villas Playa Samara	Arenas del Mar
Allegro Papagayo	Hotel The Preserve in Los Altos
Tamarindo Diría	Hotel San Bada
Flamingo Beach Resort & Spa	
Barceló Tamarindo Beach	

Note: Source: Own elaboration with research data.

ECOLOGICAL BLUE FLAG BEACHES.

On the other hand, the Pacific coast of Costa Rica has many beaches, which are internationally considered places of great scenic beauty and have been considered one of the main tourist attractions of the country.

As analyzed by Marín and Viales (2012, p. 190), the growth and development of tourism on the Pacific Coast brought with it negative consequences, among them, the contamination of the waters of rivers, seas and estuaries, a situation that was not taken into account by government authorities in the early years of tourism development.

Awareness of this problem began in 1995, when Costa Rica initiated the Ecological Blue Flag program, which consists of awarding certifications to communities that manage to satisfy aspects of seawater quality, beach quality, access to drinking water, wastewater treatment, environmental education, safety, and administration. Every year, sanitary evaluations and diagnostics are carried out to maintain the certification of the beaches.

The Ecological Blue Flag is established as an award to hotels, tourism chambers and coastal communities to comprehensively protect Costa Rica's beaches (Ecological Blue Flag Program, 2013).

Fifty-nine and 60 beaches were certified in 2009 and 2010, respectively (Honey, Vargas and Durham, 2010, p. 59). During 2012, out of 115 beaches, a total of 90 obtained Ecological Blue Flag. The following beaches obtained the Ecological Blue Flag certificate in 2012 (Soto, 2013):

5 stars	Blanca (Garabito, Puntarenas) and Punta El Madero (Santa Cruz, Guanacaste)
4 stars	Matapalo
3 stars	Junquillal Bay and Manuel Antonio
2 stars	Arenilla, Conchal and Guiones
1 star	82 beaches (you can find the list in (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2013, p. 23A) (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2013, p. 23A).

Of these 90 award-winning beaches, 71 belong to the Pacific coast and 19 to the Caribbean coast.

This program is considered important for the attraction of tourists seeking sun and beach, since the results of the award are published in the country's mass media and are a determining factor for potential visitors to decide whether or not to go to a particular beach.

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF CONSERVATION AREAS (SINAC)

Article 22 of the Biodiversity Law No. 7788, published in La Gaceta No. 101 of May 27, 1998, created the National System of Conservation Areas, SINAC (Gaceta, 1998), as an institutional management and coordination system, deconcentrated and participative, with institutional legal personality, which integrates competencies in forestry, wildlife, protected areas and the protection and conservation of watersheds and water systems. The main objectives of this agency are to dictate policies, plan and execute processes aimed at achieving sustainability in the management of the forest, wildlife, protected areas, and the protection and conservation of watersheds and water systems.

natural resources of Costa Rica. For this purpose, it divided the national territory into conservation areas within which protection areas were designated. Table 8 shows the list of protected areas in the Pacific region of Costa Rica.

Table 8

LIST OF PROTECTED AREAS OF THE PACIFIC REGION'S CONSERVATION AREAS

CONSERVATION AREA	PROTECTED AREAS
Guanacaste Conservation Area (ACG)	Horizontes Experimental Station Rincón de la Vieja National Park Santa Rosa National Park Junquillal National Wildlife Refuge Guanacaste National Park
Arenal Tempisque Conservation Area (ACAT)	Palo Verde National Park Tenorio Volcano National Park Cipancí Wildlife Refuge Lomas Barbudal Biological Reserve
Tempisque Conservation Area (ACT)	Lacustrine wetland Río Cañas Palustrine wetland Corral de Piedra National Park Barra Honda National Park Diríá National Park Las Baulas National Marine Park Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Camaronal Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Ostional Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Caletas Arío Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Cipancí Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Cipancí Hacienda El Viejo National Wildlife Refuge Hacienda El Viejo National Wildlife Refuge Iguanita National Wildlife Refuge Langosta National Wildlife Refuge Mata Redonda National Wildlife Refuge Conchal Mixed National Wildlife Refuge Cabo Blanco Absolute Natural Reserve Montealto Protected Zone Tamarindo Natural Wildlife Refuge

La Amistad-Pacifico Conservation Area (ACLAP)	Chirripó National Park Tapantí National Park Macizo de la Muerte La Amistad International Park Río Macho Forest Reserve Las Tablas Protected Zone Río Navarro-Río Sombrero Protected Zone
CONSERVATION AREA	PROTECTED AREAS
Cocos Island Marine Conservation Area (Cocos Island Marine Conservation Area - ACMIC)	Cocos Island National Park Seamount Marine Management Area
Central Pacific Conservation Area (ACOPAC)	Carara National Park La Cangreja National Park Manuel Antonio National Park Los Quetzales National Park San Lucas Island National Wildlife Refuge San Lucas Island Playa Hermosa Punta Mala Wildlife Refuge
OSA Conservation Area (ACOSA)	Térraba Sierpe National Wetland Corcovado National Park Marino Ballena National Park Piedras Blancas National Park Golfito National Wildlife Refuge Golfito Isla del Caño Biological Reserve Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve

Note: Source: Own elaboration with data from (National System of Conservation Areas, 2013).

Protected areas correspond to a total of 1,354,488 hectares of the national territory, covering 26.54% (Pavlotzky and Rojas, 2012, p. 4). The national territory is divided into 11 conservation areas, 7 of which are located in the Costa Rican Pacific. Table 8 shows the details of the protected areas according to the conservation areas to which they belong.

Figure 15 shows the distribution of protected wildlife areas found in the Costa Rican Pacific by management category. The graph shows the predominance of national parks and national wildlife refuges. The total extension of these protected areas in the Pacific totals 429,182.91 hectares of national territory, which corresponds to 36% of the total protected areas at the national level. This sum does not include the areas of the protected marine territory, which corresponds to 1,501,485 hectares, equivalent to 49.54% of the country's territorial waters (Pavlotzky and Rojas, 2012, p. 55).

All of these protected areas make up an offer based on the country's

biodiversity, which is used by various tourism companies to promote ecotourism, rural tourism and adventure tourism, as mentioned in previous sections.

On the other hand, and as can be seen in Figures 6 and 7, the number of visitors to the Pacific conservation areas has an increasing behavior in the period from 2002 to 2012, with only a decline in the year

2005, but surpassing even the areas of the Central Valley as of 2006. This demonstrates the change in tourist tastes towards areas with natural beauty, and no longer only the tendency towards "sun and beach" destinations as was the case in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Despite the above, the different regions of the Pacific have differences in the number of visitors they receive, as shown in Figure 8, which shows that the most visited areas are those of the Central Pacific.

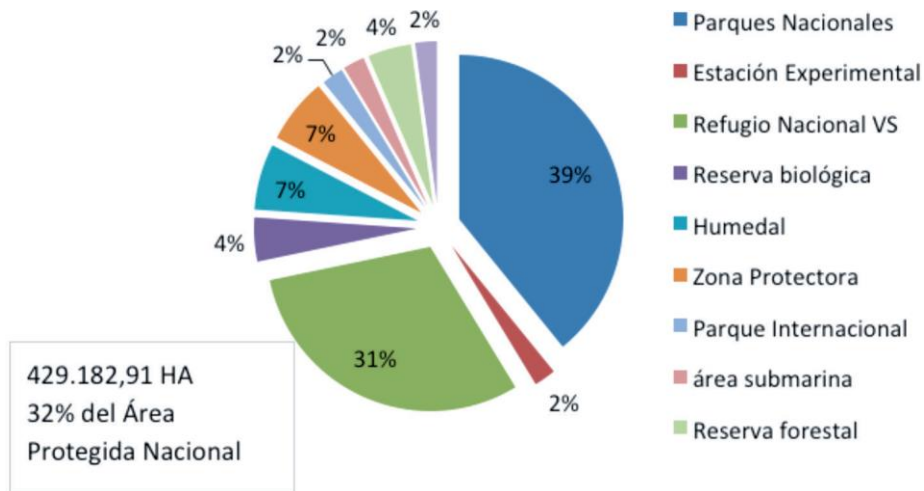


Figure 15. Protected wildlife areas by management category, Pacific of Costa Rica.
Source: Own elaboration with data from (Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación, 2013)
(National System of Conservation Areas, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

In this tour along the Costa Rican Pacific, there is a great quantity and variety of tourist activities and tourist services that provide tourists with the necessary conditions for enjoyment, rest and recreation.

The data recorded from 1997 to 2012 for the Pacific (Guanacaste and Puntarenas) show that, in general and for the entire period, the number of tourism businesses in lodging, food, travel agencies and gastronomic businesses have an upward trend, although there has been a slight decrease in some years. Only the supply of water transportation and vehicle rentals decreased during the study period. It is important to take into account that this information only refers to companies with a tourism declaration.

From the classification of the tourism activities that were analyzed, namely, enclave, ecological, adventure and rural community-based, it is noted that these activities

cannot be pigeonholed into only one of these categories. We found activities offered in several of the established tourism categories. On the other hand, the offer of this type of program is similar along the Pacific coast, with the exception of the South Pacific, where no businesses can be classified as enclave tourism.

The country has made great efforts to conserve extensive territories in its natural environment. Of the regions into which the country is divided, according to the National Conservation System, the Pacific region has registered a constant growth in the number of visitors from 2005 to 2012, surpassing even the Central Valley (second in terms of visits), which fell drastically in 2008. This shows that there is a greater taste for touring natural areas outside the Central Plateau. The data also show that most foreign visitors seek recreation in areas of natural beauty and that the main attraction is the country's beaches. However, there is an increase in other tourist activities such as: flora and fauna observation, hiking, canopy, and hot springs, visit to volcanoes, among others.

The extension and irregularity of the Pacific coast favors biodiversity and natural spaces to be enjoyed by tourists; this has been a great advantage that the country possesses and has become the seal of distinction that the Government has exploited to promote tourism development.

The vertiginous development of tourism in the Pacific region of Costa Rica during the last half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is the result of government policies that have encouraged and promoted investment in the region, mainly in the North and Central Pacific zone.

As can be seen in the study, large hotel infrastructure investments are also found mainly in the northern Pacific region, within the framework of enclave tourism, which has been highly criticized due to its high impacts on the environment and local culture. The State should control this type of projects, in order to minimize these impacts and rather turn them into examples of sustainable tourism, socially responsible and based on the strengths of the country (such as resources, capacities and local natural attractions); and that has greater possibilities of a better distribution of income to vulnerable sectors; unlike the proposals for the establishment of enclave tourism, which depends heavily on foreign tourism, highly vulnerable to the global economic recession, with high environmental impacts and little economic spillover to vulnerable sectors.

However, the development of sustainable tourism presents significant challenges in order to have a positive impact on the communities, in aspects such as: education, community organization, economic, technical and financial support from public institutions, infrastructure improvement, among others. Blanco (2012) documents the

The experience developed in two communities in northern Guanacaste, where there was a productive reconversion from agriculture to tourism, has not been as successful as expected.

One of the sections of this work showed the infrastructural progress for human and tourist settlements in some localities at three different times: 1980, 1998 and 2005. The results show that Puntarenas-Caldera, Playa Grande-Tamarindo and Herradura-Jacó are the areas with the greatest number of hectares developed during the period under study. However, for the years 2006 and 2007, the largest foreign investments were concentrated in Golfito and Osa. On the other hand, during the years 2005 to 2007, foreign real estate investments were mostly concentrated in the Pacific coast, which did not necessarily correspond to hotel projects, but to the construction of vacation homes, condominiums and villas, sites that compete with the hotel offer and also fight for resources with the local communities.

The Ecological Blue Flag Program is an important proposal that should be promoted more strongly and effectively, so that it can include more communities for certification.

The study by Villalobos, Galdeano and Tolón (2009) concludes with recommendations, which were mentioned in this study, to promote a strategy to encourage nature tourism.

As for cruise ship tourism, we observe that the entry of tourists through the Pacific port has decreased, at the same time that it has increased in the Caribbean. This has been the case since 2001. However, since 2011, the entry of tourists to the Pacific port has surpassed the Caribbean port. The latter may be the result of the problems generated by the government's proposals to build a new port in the Caribbean, a situation that has generated much controversy among workers' groups and the community of Limón.

On the other hand, the entry of tourists to the Pacific port from cruise ships has not generated the expected economic benefits for the inhabitants of nearby communities, because visitors arrive with pre-purchased tourist packages that take them to destinations outside the city. Despite this, and according to Mora (2013, p. 109) there is a moderate increase in income for small merchants, mainly those selling products such as liquor, tobacco, and travel souvenirs.

According to Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010, p. 101) it is not advisable to expand high-volume cruise ship tourism in Puntarenas and Caldera, as it is not providing benefits to these regions, nor to the country as a whole. They recommend leaving mass cruise ship tourism in the Caribbean zone, as part of a general tourism product for the country, and focusing on cruise ships in the Pacific.

small (less than 250 passengers) that provide more benefits per passenger to the region and have a lower social and environmental impact. In addition, they recommend negotiating higher per passenger and other fares and services, as well as giving greater access to local vendors and businesses to offer goods and services ashore to cruise ship users.

Despite the increase in the number of tourists visiting the Pacific areas, there are still rural areas with low human development indexes, mainly in the North Pacific and South Pacific regions of the country, which still shows the lack of a better distribution, planning or chaining of tourism activities that would allow the benefits to be radiated to the entire rural population of the coasts. According to Honey, Vargas and Durham (2010, p. 103), enclave tourism (as we have called it in this study) and cruise ship tourism have brought lower economic benefits to the country, in contrast to tourism related to natural and cultural activities, which has more positive impacts on the local economy, so the country should promote the latter.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that tourists may be motivated by specific attractions, but have to travel to other places where there are other sites of interest, as well as lodging conditions, accessibility and complementary offers, etc., which may, in their case, frustrate the choice, if these other factors act negatively on the chosen destination (Lepe and Pardellas, 2008, p. 162). Given the above, the development of the supply of tourism activities must go parallel to the improvement of appropriate conditions for the attention of tourists, i.e.: roads, transportation services, lodging, food, security, ornamentation, etc. In the case of the Pacific region, there are large differences in the supply of tourist services between the North and Central Pacific and the South Pacific, which may influence the low demand in the latter.

Finally, the promotional campaigns carried out by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute in recent years, to position internationally the image of a "green" Costa Rica and promote nature, ecological or sustainable tourism, require a differentiated approach for the different regions, according to their singularities, as indicated by Lepe and Pardellas (2008, p. 165), to attract visitors seeking those particularities, also considering that most international tourists come to the country for leisure and recreation reasons.

It is important to mention other factors that may come into play such as: levels of education, institutional strength and social expenditures that limit the retribution of tourism development (Croes, 2012, p. 58), so the State must review its public policy and strategy in tourism, as it has been successful in reducing poverty, but has not been able to convert improvements in

education and health indicators in productive earnings, including those generated by tourism. "Inequality levels in Costa Rica have increased since the 1990s and poverty rates have stagnated despite economic growth in general and tourism performance in particular" (Croes, 2012, p. 56).

The offer that has been described is based mainly on the potential of nature and biodiversity of the Pacific Coast, which as described, includes natural areas such as beaches, mountains, rivers, caves, forests, protected conservation areas, in which different activities such as horseback riding, hiking, observation, fishing, diving, canopy, etc. are offered. However, this study has not considered the cultural and local customs offer, nor others such as health tourism and business tourism, new concepts that have recently emerged. Although in some ways, rural community-based tourism proposes community-based cultural activities, there are others that form part of the annual periodic offerings of the communities themselves, which include activities related to specific celebrations, such as civic festivities, fairs and festivals, among others. In the specific case of Punta-renas Centro there are: carnivals, the festivities of the Virgin of the Sea, the Sol y Arena marathon, the Gastronomic Fair, the election of the Miss of the Pacific, and in recent years, competitive sports activities such as beach volleyball competitions, cycling, soccer, etc. (Chen & García, 2007, p. 126). All of these events represent community and local stakeholders' efforts to maintain or reactivate the region's economy, but currently only attract mainly national tourism.

Lastly, the analysis of the social, environmental and environmental impacts of the

The economic and social impacts of tourism development investments, including those associated with infrastructure construction, quality and long-term employment generated, the development of related commerce in the communities, information jobs (sale of handicrafts, fruits, etc.), education, pressure on the required resources, waste management and pollution, among others.

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