

## Rural tourism, an option for the reactivation of tourism in the post-COVID era in Nayarit

## Turismo rural, una opción para la reactivación del turismo en la era posCOVID en Nayarit

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### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted society in general, one of the activities that has been strongly affected is tourism; which in recent years had presented a constant growth in both the number of visitors and income. However, restrictions on mobility stopped this growth. In addition to the above, the social implications that these restrictive actions have brought about are also palpable in different areas. Therefore, after the arrival of the “new normal”, tourism actors have begun to generate strategies to reactivate this phenomenon. In Nayarit, the interest in promoting the implementation of new routes to rural areas, which are based on the identification of both natural and cultural elements. Therefore, this communication presents an option for the design of a rural tourism route in the municipality of San Blas, Nayarit; for which it begins with the identification of the cultural and natural wealth of the territory in question.

### Resumen

La pandemia por Covid-19 ha impactado a la sociedad en general, una de las actividades que ha sido fuertemente afectada es el turismo; el cual en los últimos años había presentado un crecimiento constante tanto en número de visitantes como en ingresos. Sin embargo, las restricciones a la movilidad detuvieron dicho crecimiento. Aunado a lo anterior, las implicaciones sociales que consigo ha traído estas acciones restrictivas son también palpables en distintos ámbitos. Por lo anterior, tras la llegada de la “nueva normalidad” los actores del turismo han comenzado a generar estrategias para la reactivación de dicho fenómeno. En Nayarit, el interés por promover la implementación de nuevas rutas hacia espacios rurales, las cuales tienen su sustento en la identificación de los elementos tanto naturales como culturales. Por lo anterior en esta comunicación se presenta una opción para el diseño de una ruta de turismo rural en el municipio de San Blas, Nayarit; para lo cual se inicia con la identificación de la riqueza cultural y natural del territorio en cuestión.

### Rural tourism, San Blas, COVID-19

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## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the advances of the research carried out with the aim of generating a proposal that encourages sustainable development based on rural tourism activities in the localities selected for study. Above all, at this time in which the dynamics of tourism has changed due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic; for which the different levels of government, as well as the private sector in Mexico begin to generate a series of actions in order to mitigate negative impacts, not only in the economy but also in the social, cultural and environmental spheres. One of the strategies is to look for alternatives to traditional tourism, generating routes to rural areas, with low population density, in towns whose natural and cultural richness allow activities with a tourist focus that generate unique experiences in tourists. For this, it is essential to locate those localities within the state territory, to later carry out an inventory of its elements; This document presents the progress of the surveys carried out in the municipality of San Blas, Nayarit, as well as alternatives for its tourist use, from the rural tourism modality. Which is an option for the economic reactivation after the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Rural tourism

With regard to rural tourism, it promotes integral development for the communities and mitigates poverty and inequalities, prevents the migration of settlers, promotes the fair distribution of income and contributes to the conservation of the environment. This tourism modality is developed dynamically with the principles that the Constitution determines in the rights for peoples and nationalities, that is, socially supportive, environmentally responsible, economically viable and culturally enriching, therefore, it constitutes an efficient alternative to generate sources of work. (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008)

In the same sense, Ivars specifies about the activities of rural tourism,

“It includes the activities that people carry out during their trips and stays in rural areas, with a minimum stay of one night, in order to enjoy the attractions of "rural areas" and the possibilities that these spaces offer to satisfy their needs. more specific”. (Ivars, 2000)

While from the institutional perspective in Mexico this segment is considered as

“the human side of alternative tourism, since it is attributed the opportunity it offers to the tourist to live with rural communities, to know and learn other ways of life, in their daily, productive and cultural aspects, raising awareness about the respect and value of the cultural identity of communities and peoples”. (SECTUR, 2002).

Which represents an opportunity for integration into the tourism phenomenon based on the daily practices of rural communities, without neglecting their traditional way of life.

This type of tourism, as expressed by Luna

“It is oriented towards the perspective of culture and the use of natural resources by local communities, since it offers tourists the great opportunity to experience the encounter with the different ways of living of the communities that coexist in a rural environment, and also makes them aware of the respect and value of their cultural identity”. (Luna, 2014)

The Federal Tourism Secretariat (2002) defines rural tourism as

“trips whose purpose is to carry out activities of coexistence and interaction with a rural community, in all those daily social, cultural and productive expressions of the same; It also considers within this type of tourism the following activities:

- Ethno-tourism.
- Eco-Archeology.
- Agrotourism.
- Preservation and use of Traditional Medicine.
- Gastronomic workshops.
- Rural photography.
- Learning dialects.
- Mystical experiences.
- Craft workshops.

Rural tourism is considered an “economic activity deeply related to agriculture, in Mexico there are producers who by practicing this activity would allow them to diversify their activities towards the field of tourism based on their daily chores and respecting their identity” (Valdez & Ochoa, 2015).

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) rural tourism is a

“type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide spectrum of products generally linked to nature activities, agriculture, rural ways of life and cultures, angling and site visits of interest.

Rural tourism activities are developed in non-urban (rural) environments with the following characteristics:

- Low population density.
- Landscapes and spatial planning where agriculture and forestry prevail.
- Social structures and traditional ways of life " (OMT, 2020).

### **Sustainable development**

At present, the idea of sustainable development is increasingly present in the various areas of social reality; even so, the word itself is ambiguous. This term refers to “the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations” (Brundtland Report, 1987). This word, but above all the essence that exists in it, has been quite controversial since its emergence, to the extent that even today there is no consensus regarding its use and meaning, there are those who use sustainable and sustainable indiscriminately and there are others who make a differentiation between the two terms.

The use of the term sustainable spread in the eighties with the expression sustainable or sustainable development. This, depending on the language in which it is contextualized, has variations. For example, in English, sustainable will refer to a positive dynamic connotation: to keep going continuously, endure without living way, that is, to advance continuously, to keep walking or walking, to resist it without giving in, to persevere in effort. (Bifani, 1997: 114).

The foregoing then refers to a dynamic process whose rhythm must be maintained, thus introducing a long-term temporal vision. While in Spanish to sustain or sustain means to hold an object firm, to provide support, to keep something in a medium or place without dropping it or doing it very slowly, to suffer, tolerate, keep something in its being or state (Bifani, 1997); This definition gives the idea of an effort made so that something does not fall, that is, it is a static conception.

Peña (2008), after extensive reflection regarding the origin, meaning and construction of the word, reaches the conclusion that both words can be taken as synonyms, depending on the country, since sustainable and sustainable are two different expressions that share the content; that is, two signifiers with the same meaning.

The term sustainable development was first formalized in the Brundtland report in 1987; This document shows the deterioration that has been caused to the planet from the globalization that has been generated on the planet. The document is titled Our Common Future and was presented by the UN World Commission for Environment and Development. It raises the idea of visualizing the environment and development in an integrated way, which both go hand in hand, therefore, actions that allow meeting current needs without compromising those of future generations should be considered. This document served as the axis for the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

The Earth Summit, also called the Rio Summit (1992), served as a space for discussion and reflection on the issue of sustainable development. Providing elements to clarify the concept itself,

“human beings are at the center of concerns related to sustainable development. They have the right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. In order to achieve sustainable development, the protection of the environment should be an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation”. (ONU, 1992).

At this summit the document called Agenda 21 was generated, this is a broad action plan based on principles of sustainable development, it considers technological innovation and cooperation between social and economic agents as axes for change. All the above, the principles of sustainability have been implemented in the various activities carried out by man.

According to Gutiérrez (1994), for development to be considered sustainable, it must meet four basic conditions:

- Be economically feasible.
- Be ecologically sound.
- Socially fair.
- Culturally equitable, respectful and without gender discrimination.

A graphic way of presenting the scope of sustainability is found in the so-called Scheme of the three pillars of sustainable development which marks the results of the relationship between the elements that are involved in sustainability, the ecological, social and economic aspect, the Which must coexist in harmony to achieve the same sustainability that must be: economically viable, socially equitable and ecologically bearable.

However, despite the fact that sustainable development seeks to balance these three dimensions, there is a marked orientation towards environmental issues, leaving aside the other two. A large part of the strategies that are implemented are focused on correcting human-generated environmental impacts, but without achieving a profound transformation in economic or social systems.

In this sense, Foladori and Tommasino (2000) identify three positions regarding the evolution of sustainable development:

- "Ecological sustainability: it focuses on environmental problems such as: predation and pollution.

- Limited social sustainability: adds to ecological sustainability the issue of poverty, widely considered as hunger, shortage of housing, among others. This is the cause of ecological unsustainability. Here limited social sustainability has a bridging role for the analysis of ecological sustainability.
- Social and ecological sustainability, also called social and ecological coevolution; considers as part of the environment the abiotic environment, live species and congeners. The social problem must be analyzed from the technical perspective as well as from the perspective of social relations".
- These three positions reflect current trends in sustainable development, however, it is considered that it goes beyond just environmentalism, for which various authors have generated an epistemic philosophical framework that supports the paradigm of sustainable development; from which I know such as good living, endogenous development and the dialogue of knowledge.

"The Western scientific community, which inevitably has to accept the wisdoms of the original indigenous nations. The wisdom of indigenous nations can contribute to the understanding of the world, with more balanced visions regarding the relationship between man and nature and in general an integral perception of life ". (Delgado, 2012).

### **The COVID-19 pandemic**

The year 2020 was beginning and the world was barely hearing a piece of news that would undoubtedly impact globalized life, marking a before and after it.

"On December 31, 2019, China notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of a mysterious pneumonia in Wuhan, home to about 11 million people. Experts from around the world began trying to identify the causative agent. It is supposed to have originated in a seafood market in town, which was soon closed. Initially it was reported that there were around 40 people infected ". (Deutsche Welle, 2020).

From this moment on, this new disease remained in the daily life of the media since, in the days following the announcement by China, countries such as Thailand and Japan reported cases of infected people, who went to the same market in Wuhan. City that was quarantined as of January 23, as a measure to try to stop the spread of the virus. One of the actions that were launched was the suspension of public transport; later.

The restrictive measures to both internal and foreign mobility implemented in countries where the virus begins to proliferate, make tourism begin to suffer havoc.

Mexico was no exception, in the same way, “the coronavirus arrived in the country through an international traveler who returned after his trip to Italy. Which was confirmed on February 28”. (Forbes, 2020). From this moment on, the possible panorama and the gradual implementation of various measures in order to minimize mass infections begins to be seen. Some of the actions implemented during phase 1 are the advance of two weeks of the Easter holidays, the suspension of massive events, the implementation of the Healthy Distance Day, this includes the temporary suspension of non-essential activities in the public, social and private sectors, including tourism, and the rescheduling of massive events. In phase 2, which began on March 24, work activities involving the movement of people from their homes to work and back were suspended. Phase 1 measures that implied suspension of massive events were also extended, and the Federal Government suspends its non-essential activities. On March 30, Covid-19 is classified as a health emergency, so the actions described above last until April 30, and 15 days later they are extended until May 30; As part of the actions implemented to mitigate the ravages of the pandemic, as of July 1, certain activities considered as priorities were reopened, however, restrictions on mobility continued and the tourist centers remained closed; visualizing its opening under low traffic conditions and with demanding hygiene measures. For which the adaptations that would be made in the tourist industry are beginning to spread.

The tourism sector has probably been the hardest hit by the health (and economic) crisis we are experiencing. Beyond the massive cancellations of reservations for and the risk situation in the destinations, the Coronavirus crisis will have a profound impact on the way we travel and how we interact.

Tourism will probably be the sector that will find it most difficult to recover, for reasons inherent to tourism, such as limitations to travel, the distrust that the crisis has generated and the economic recession that will cause many people to have less money to travel.

In order to mitigate the ravages caused by the pandemic, various strategies have been manifested both at the national and state levels. In the specific case of Nayarit, which is one of the 32 states of Mexico; the State Secretariat of Tourism has generated a series of strategies in order to reactivate tourism activity; one of them is the creation of regional tourist routes.

Therefore, it is considered that rural tourism is a pertinent option for the state of Nayarit since it has an important diversity of resources, both natural and cultural; which represent an alternative for sustainable local development through the implementation of rural tourism products. Which can promote rural development, in a sustained and orderly way that integrates visitors into the daily dynamics of the inhabitants that allow generating benefits for both parties, which also promotes the conservation of both natural and cultural resources.

The integration of tourists to the daily activities of rurality can occur both from the approach to natural spaces and cultural areas both in the material and the immaterial. The study of these elements and manifestations from a tourist perspective contributes to strengthening local knowledge, as well as laying the foundations for future research and investment projects. Mainly considering that rural tourism is presented as one of the preferred tourist niches in the short term, and, therefore, a faster recovery is expected. (Santos, 2020).

## Tourism in Nayarit

Nayarit is one of the 32 states of Mexico; its capital is Tepic, Nayarit represents 1.4% of the national territory. (INEGI, 2020). Tourism has been considered as a priority activity within the Government plans and programs; The current State Development Plan (PES) 2017-2021 includes the State Program for the Promotion and Promotion of Tourism with which it is sought

“Promote and strengthen the positioning of Nayarit from alternative, ecological and traditional tourism in the national and international context with emphasis on its status as a tourist status in order to increase the economic spill, the average stay and the offer of tourist, cultural and recreational attractions” (PES, 2017-2021).

To achieve the above, it establishes a series of lines of action, among which those related to the diversification of alternative tourism products and the relaunch of tourist routes and circuits are taken up.

In addition to the above, the PES 2017-2021 includes the Program for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage. This is the program

“Policies, strategies, regulations, instruments and action plan, in zones, areas, polygons, sites and natural environments, where specific norms will be applied in order to safeguard cultural and environmental heritage. It also includes within its lines of action integrating the state system of information on the cultural and environmental heritage of the State of Nayarit, which allows its classification and cataloging, in accordance with the constitutional provisions, legal regulations and heritage standards in accordance with the competences for its conservation in the national, state and municipal order”. (Ibid)

In addition, the General Directorate of Destination Management of the Federal Tourism Secretariat disseminates on its website as main characteristics of Nayarit its archaeological sites, colonial and 19th century buildings and monuments, its natural wealth such as rivers, mountains, landscapes, flora and fauna as well as its warm humid climate whose average annual temperature is 22.5° C.

The Marietas Islands, Guayabitos, Nuevo Vallarta and Punta de Mita also stand out as attractions; This shows that tourist activity is seen on the south coast, in the municipalities of Compostela and Nuevo Vallarta, this shows the importance of the implementation of the State Program for the Promotion and Promotion of Tourism.

- Arrival of total tourists to the Entity 2,992,272 (Datatur, 2018).
- Average annual hotel occupancy 74.48% (Ibidem).
- Magical Towns 3 (Sectur, 2020).
- Second state economic axis, after agriculture (SecturNay, 2019).
- Second national place in hotel occupancy, only after Quintana Roo (Ibidem).

However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, tourist activity in the state has caused a slowdown in investments, in addition to the loss of jobs; According to the data published by Datatur (2020) during the second quarter of the year, tourism had the following effects:

- The GDP of temporary accommodation and food and beverage preparation services fell by 70%.
- National tourist arrivals to hotel rooms decreased by 92.2%.
- Hotel occupancy and international tourist arrivals by air fell 94.1% respectively.

Both at the national and state level, they seek to implement various strategies during the "new normal" in order to reactivate tourism. At the state level, one of these strategies is the design and implementation of regional tourist routes. Which also gives the guideline for compliance with the provisions of the PES 2017-2021.

**Methodology**

In order to identify and document those spaces within the state territory that have a natural and cultural wealth susceptible to tourist use, it is considered pertinent to develop an investigation with a mixed approach. Through which it is feasible to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Privileging social participation through workshops and diverse practices that allow identifying the needs, perceptions and interests of the community. The foregoing from the perspective of the ethnographic method, considering the subject as a possessor of cultural and natural knowledge regarding the territory they inhabit. The ethnographic method descriptively studies cultures, according to the meaning given by Malinowski (1972). In this same sense, Guba mentions regarding the ethnographic method:

“It is a process directed towards the discovery of many idiosyncratic but important stories and tales, told by real people, about real events, in a real and natural way. This approach tries to present episodes that are portions of life documented with a natural language and that represent as faithfully as possible how people feel, what they know, how they know it and what their beliefs, perceptions and ways of seeing and understanding are.” (Guba, 1978, cited in Martínez, 2005).

The research is developed in 2 phases in a chronological linear manner; starting with the preliminary prospecting of the territory that allows identifying the localities to work. After this, the next phase is carried out, which consists of the elaboration of a diagnosis of the situation of the territory from the perspective of tourism, in which the inventory of heritage elements is carried out, as well as their characterization; The preparation of an inventory requires orderly and systematized work; for this reason it is important to consider some stages

- Historical and documentary research prior to fieldwork.
- Delimitation of the study area.
- Field tours:
- List and preliminary assessment.
- Analysis of the information.

For the preparation of the inventory, the Unesco Conventions (of the cultural and natural heritage and the Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage) are taken as a basis; These are filled out based on documentary and field investigations, applying ethnographic techniques such as non-participant observation, participant observation, and in-depth and life interviews. Participant observation is the information gathering technique regardless of participation in the investigated group; while participant observation is the "process that empowers researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observation by participating in their activities." (Kawulich, 2005). The data is recorded through the field diary and audiovisual media. The interview is a process of evocation of memory; It is a means through which information, data and life experiences of the interviewee are obtained.

Identification for tourism purposes carries with it the valuation and ranking that allows establishing an order of importance to be considered as a tourist attraction. Therefore, in addition to the registration elements included in the files, others such as tourist services and equipment are considered.

**Results**

This research project has been carried out in different municipalities of the state of Nayarit, so far research work has been carried out in 12 municipalities: Tepic, Xalisco, Santa María del Oro, San Blas, Compostela, Bahía de Banderas, Ahuacatlán, Jala , Ixtlán del Río, Amatlán de Cañas, San Pedro Lagunillas, Santiago Ixcuintla, La Yesca, El Nayar. In each of them elements such as festivities, myths, legends, artisanal knowledge and gastronomic knowledge have been identified, the latter mainly based on local agricultural, livestock and fishing production; from which different cultural manifestations have been generated that currently represent the identity traits of the municipalities and their localities.

The information identified and documented is the basis for the integration of an inventory that concentrates the main elements that can be used by tourism.

One of the municipalities in which an important number of natural and cultural elements susceptible of tourist use with an orientation towards the rural modality has been identified is San Blas; which is a coastal municipality that has stood out for its strategic location, since in its territory the physiographic provinces of the Neovolcanic Axis converge, the Pacific Coastal Plain, highlighting the estaruina area that is part of the Marismas Nacionales Biosphere Reserve. In addition to the above, San Blas has an outstanding past with evidence of outstanding events from pre-Hispanic times and throughout time to the present, which have left both material and immaterial evidence in the different heritage elements that can currently be identified.

Therefore, San Blas is a territory with potential for the development of rural tourism, given that at this time in which due to the Covid-19 pandemic it is necessary to maintain social distancing measures, in order to mitigate infections ; and at the same time, strategies are being sought to reactivate the state economy, especially by maintaining the security protocols implemented to contain the disease; It seeks to reactivate tourism on a small scale, without reaching the mobilization of large masses, much less the concentration of these in closed places. Therefore, rural tourism, which is based on the movement of small groups, whose interaction with the visited sites takes place in open places, in the countryside; and whose economic benefit allows to strengthen the income of the communities, without neglecting their daily activities.

In the specific case of the municipality of San Blas, 8 localities have been identified whose natural and cultural characteristics with potential for the implementation of activities typical of rural tourism, such as agrotourism, gastronomic workshops, rural photography, eco-archeology and artisan workshops.

The communities studied so far are Mecatán, Jalcocotán, El Llano, Navarrete, Huaristema, San Blas, Aticama, Miramar and Matanchén. (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Localities studied, San Blas, Nayarit  
*Source: Own elaboration with Google Earth*

Each of these localities has various elements that allow them to be integrated as part of a tourist route in which the aforementioned activities take place. Considering also that there are access roads that connect the localities with the state capital from which it is possible to design the route. Likewise, San Blas, the municipal seat, concentrates a variety of accommodation and restaurant services.

The municipality of San Blas has a long history dating back to pre-Hispanic times, and is a point of reference throughout the history of the state of Nayarit. In addition to this, its privileged location in which two physiographic regions converge, such as the Neovolcanic Axis and the Pacific Coastal Plain, make this territory a rich and ideal site for the development of rural tourism.

In these localities there is an important production of mango, banana, jackfruit, plum, coupled with agricultural production, fishing also stands out, of species such as mullet, dorado, shrimp, as well as oyster extraction. The above allows to have natural landscapes that together with the traditional activities carried out by its inhabitants in this territory allow the design of photographic routes and agro-tourism.



In addition to the above, activities related to the typical tasks of the communities are integrated, as well as their traditional knowledge, holding workshops, among which gastronomic ones with wide potential are considered, since traditionally many of these communities are visited by hikers who come to eat the traditional dishes prepared with products of the region, such as the tatemada lisa, the zarandeado fish, scallops in the shell, ceviches, banana bread, coconut atole, to name a few. In addition to the above, the historical and cultural aspect is essential in this territory, supported by its prolific past, of which there is evidence such as its architecture and customs that it is also feasible to integrate the route.

### Conclusions

This research arose in response to the need for diversification of tourist destinations in the State of Nayarit, mainly motivated by the consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in tourism in Nayarit. Therefore, it was possible to develop an investigation focused in the first instance on the identification and documentation of elements susceptible to tourist use, for which a methodology based on the ethnographic method was designed, which it is concluded was decisive for the achievement of the given objectives. This allowed the subjects to be integrated into the research, making them a main axis of the same.

Based on the elements that have been identified and documented, it is considered that there is a potential for the development of rural tourism in different contexts of the Nayarit territory, which also allows monitoring the lines of action stipulated in the PES 2017-2021, It also represents one more option for economic reactivation in rural communities after the effects caused by Covid-19, whose impacts on the economy have been felt in all sectors.

### Recommendations

Although research work has been carried out in more than half of the municipalities of Nayarit, it has not been exhaustive, that is, there are still many communities and heritage elements that need to be included in the inventory.

Above all, giving opportunity to the integration of the inhabitants of the studied territories, so that, in addition to this, in an institutional way, the Ministry of Tourism visualizes among the actions to implement the design and implementation of regional tourist routes for the reactivation of tourism. As evidenced by the results of this research, the identification and documentation of these natural and cultural elements are the starting point for the rest of the process of designing a tourist route.

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