

**TO DO! 2006**  
**Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

**Award Winner**

**CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA**

**Represented by:**

**Mr. Marcelo Reynoso, Coordinator,  
La Consulta, San Carlos  
Mendoza Province  
Argentina**

**Rationale for the Award**

**by**

**Dr. Christian Adler**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA (Ways of Altamira) is a smallholder association headquartered in the Argentinean city of La Consulta, located in the district of San Carlos (Mendoza Province). The community of about 10,000 inhabitants is located in the oasis area of Valle de Uco on the eastern border of the Andes, approximately three hours by plane from the capital Buenos Aires.

In November 2006, the author travelled to La Consulta on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development in order to assess the entry of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA for the TO DO! Contest 2006 on location. In accordance with the insights and knowledge gained, and in appreciation of its objectives, working principles and activities, it is recommended to award the CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA association with the TO DO! price at the ITB 2007.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Valle de Uco is situated on the eastern border of the Andes at 975 metres above sea level. Administratively, it is partitioned into the districts of San Carlos, Tupungato and Tunuyán. The nearest large city is the provincial capital of Mendoza, which is located about 120 kilometres to the north. Today's Valle de Uco was originally a steppe territory (dry Pampa), which was developed into a fertile oasis landscape by means of an extensive irrigation system utilising the numerous rivers emerging from the mountains.

As a result of the favourable climate (a lot of sun, warm winters) the Mendoza province has become the most important wine growing region of Argentina. The wines from Valle de Uco attain the highest prices in this region. The grape variety "Malbec" is cultivated and pressed, yielding a fruity red wine. Fruits, predominantly apples, pears and peaches are also grown, and vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes or garlic are cultivated in the region on a large scale. On average, each family has between three and ten hectares of arable land at their disposal. Here, in contrast to other Argentinean regions, animal husbandry plays a relatively marginal economic role.

During the dramatic depression in Argentina, which had its climax in the years 2000 and 2001, and due to the high Peso exchange rate since the Nineties (at the time, 1 Argentine Peso corresponded to 1 US Dollar, while today the exchange rate stands at 3:1), small farmers were not able to sell their agrarian products either for export (their wine had become too expensive due to the unfavourable exchange rate on the world market), or on the domestic market. Since the access to their bank accounts was blocked, many customers did not possess any cash money. Consequently, people were forced to find new sources of income in order to maintain their agricultural activities and ensure a modest standard of living. Another factor complicating this situation was the privatisation of state property to the benefit of large foreign investors, a development which dates back to the eighties and has continued until the present to the disadvantage of the small farmers.

Agro-tourism provided some citizens of La Consulta with a chance to diversify their income and free themselves from the precarious economic situation. They reported on their intentions over the local radio station. Other families took notice and joined the group in order to participate in the planned agro-tourism project. Together they discussed what each family was able to render and wished to contribute to the development of a socially responsible tourist offer. This is how a network of 16 providers gradually joined up and worked out the concept for the encounter journey described below (see Chapter 3).

Following the foundation of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA in August of 2002 (at first still as a loose alliance of individual families, and since January of 2007 as an official association), a group of eight tourists was initially invited in order to test the feasibility of the farmers' ideas and observe their acceptance by the guests.

A few months later, the state-owned agricultural research institute INTA (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria) was admitted into the group. As a result, CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA obtained contacts to other institutions and sponsors, which subsequently ensured broader-based support in areas such as vocational training (customer support, regional, cultural and historical knowledge).

Moreover, measures for product improvement and marketing were also carried out under the auspices of INTA. Since INTA, as a research institute, has not pursued any economic interests, their representatives were able to work within the project as neutral mediators or qualified intermediaries and consultants. This has considerably facilitated the decision-making processes within the small-scale farming structure.

In addition, the contact to the German tour operator Aventoura GmbH was established. From 2003 on, this tour operator regularly sent groups to La Consulta. The proceeds realized through this venture have meanwhile become an economic constant for the hosts. Further travel groups as well as local visitors also came in the subsequent years.

### **3. THE PROGRAMME**

Through a direct encounter with the local population, CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA wishes to offer interested tourists the chance to become directly acquainted with the culture of the rural population and the way of life in the oasis setting of the Valle de Uco. CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA therefore provides their guests with varied one or two-day proposals.

Tourist group participants are initially accommodated with different families in their private homes (with accommodations for a maximum of 20 guests). Individual guest rooms were provided and furnished appropriately. The baths and toilets are used together with the family, and the dining or living room is used as breakfast room. The host families speak only Spanish; no German or English is spoken. Therefore, gestures will often have to suffice to communicate with the guests who do not speak Spanish.

Under the guidance of Mr. Marcelo Reynoso, who learned German during a stay in Germany, the programme begins with a visit to the village of La Consulta. After that, the guests are taken on a walk around the immediate vicinity, which takes about an hour. The irrigation system, to which the region owes its fertility, is visited, and information is given on the distribution system used for channelling the water from the river Tunuyán so that each farmer gets a fair amount of water for his fields.

In the next two days, the individual members of the network are visited or their services are used in a rotating order. One network member for instance runs the local pottery workshop, in which decorative hand-crafted objects are baked in the "old style" in a ceramic kiln modelled after the traditional Inca kilns, and are then offered for sale. It is also possible for interested guests to work with the clay, and form and bake figures.

For excursions and visits to other network members, horses and sulkies as well as bicycles are provided for use by different families from the CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA association. In this manner, the vacationers are able to visit the different businesses of the network during their two-day stay. The programme utilizes an entertaining method of acquainting the guests with the region through warm-hearted hospitality under the motto: "Country life in Argentina". The activities

include baking bread as well as a guided tour through the fruit plantations, vineyards, and the visit of a pressing plant (with wine tasting and local cheese specialties), or the guided tour through the agricultural research institute of La Consulta, INTA (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria). For lunch and evening meals different hosts serve regional or local specialties such as: "Empanadas" (filled dumplings) and "Challa" (marinated beef) or "Goatling on the grill", with red wine from the region and preserved fruits for desert. Last but not least, the visitor programme is topped off by music, songs and regional dances in the evening.

#### 4. APPRAISAL OF THE PROJECT

The appraisal of the activities of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA with the **eight TO DO!-criteria for socially responsible tourism** leads to the following valuation:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation</b></p>
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The project satisfies this demand, since the local people form a network they themselves have founded, which provides the foundation for a participatory form of agro-tourism, in which they decide and implement autonomously. Joining this network is voluntary. Members can contribute in accordance with their interests and needs and can determine in which way they want to cooperate in the overall concept.

At present, the network consists of 16 members

- seven families in agricultural production
- four families active in handicrafts
- four families, which offer accommodations with family involvement and
- one institution, the agricultural institute INTA.

The motive for the foundation of this network was, as already described, the overall worsening living situation of the Argentinean population during the depression in the beginning of the millennium. It led to the idea at La Consulta, to bring together volunteers for a joint tourism project with the goal of conserving and upgrading the agricultural culture, production and valorisation of local products.

After the end of the depression, tourism today provides the majority of network members with a welcome additional source of income. This form of tourism is therefore viewed as an element for the further economic and social development of the region.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life</b></p>
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The local media of the Mendoza province seems to be very open to news connected with innovations in the tourist sector. The focus of the local media on this issue therefore not only advertises CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA, but also disseminates the idea realized in La Consulta throughout the entire region, an effect which increases the level of awareness of the advantages of a socially responsible and culturally compatible commitment in the area of agro-tourism.

The initiators report that, as a result of the occasional radio transmissions and newspaper reports, there are already inquiries from the neighbouring communities and even from other Argentinean provinces which have shown interest for the project. In the meantime about 800 pupils and students are said to come to La Consulta every year in order to learn about the concept on site.

The municipality of La Consulta has organised a contest in order to find a logo for CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA with 50 citizens participating with their designs.

A school class, which was asked to do a social project, chose CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA as their topic. The pupils interviewed the members of the network and produced a folder on each family, in which they portray in an illustrative and very lively manner the respective family chronicles and the origin of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA. These folders are available in the homes, where guests are welcome to read them.

At the beginning, the network founders lacked the needed know-how on tourism. It proved to be very helpful that one of the members is a licensed travel agent. On the recommendation of the agricultural research institute INTA, courses were held in order to further qualify the members of the network and to prepare them for the contact with their customers. The topics: *Customer support, geographic and environmental aspects of the region, cultural and historical background, tourism and its products*. The training took place in the framework of the National Programme for the Support of the Development of Sustainable Agriculture "PROFEDER" (Programa Federal de Apoyo al Desarrollo Rural Sustentable) and its sub-programme in favour of producing families "PROFAM" (Productores familiares). PROFAM provides technical support in the agricultural sector, as well as workshops and conferences organised at the national level.

At present no negative effects of tourism are observed, since they have not yet arisen in the programme chosen for the project.

**Participation of broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism.**

CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA links up families from the middle and lower middle class, which make up the predominant social class in the district of San Carlos.

The aim of the association is to bring together the small farmers and small artisans for the development of a joint programme of agro-tourism. Therefore, new members are welcome. Those wishing to participate in the project can make suggestions at the general meetings and explain which products they and their families are able to contribute. They are given constructive criticism from network members, and members even help out financially to some extent, should one of the applicants lack the necessary start-up capital to realise his/her project.

The network members normally meet twice a month or even more often, if necessary. Among other things, these meetings facilitate self-criticism and continuous improvement of the products or services offered. Decisions that are jointly arrived at are laid down as guidelines.

So far, the tourist potential of La Consulta has not yet been fully exploited. There are, for example, numerous scenic attractions in the vicinity, which could also be used for the CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA programme. There is also a shortage of accommodations. The inclusion of further members into the network would clearly benefit the whole project.

**Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and further training**

CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA uses the small travel agency of Mr. Marcelo Reynoso in downtown La Consulta, which deals with the organisation for all travel groups wishing to participate in the programme.

Concomitantly, Mr. Reynoso also works as the Incoming Agent for Aventoura, where he offers journeys to other parts of Argentina under the name of "Latina Real Tours". In addition, his agency also works independently from the German operator. As a tour guide, Mr. Reynoso is active in the programme of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA, as well as for the German tour operator in South

America. The office is equipped with a fast internet connection via satellite, disposes of two computers and a website ([www.estacionvalledeuco.com.ar](http://www.estacionvalledeuco.com.ar)), which also contains advertising for CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA.

For the maintenance of this office, each network member pays a monthly fee of 10 Pesos (2.50 Euro). During their stay at CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA, the guests are charged an all inclusive fee of 160.00 Pesos, which corresponds to about 40.00 Euro per day. The proceeds are passed on to the members according to the respective services without any other deductions. The amounts paid to the hosts per guest are as follows:

For one overnight stay:	14 Euro
for the breakfast:	3 Euro
for a meal:	6 Euro
for a horse (half day):	10 Euro
for renting a bike (half day)	2 Euro.

A visit in the winery, pottery workshop or the fruit garden costs 2.50 Euro per guest independently of whether the guests purchase wine or acquire a ceramic article as a souvenir. Members who make hatbands with the emblem of the association for straw hats that are given as a souvenir to the guests are also paid.

A family with two guestrooms (double room) can accommodate four tourists, thereby earning 68.00 Euro per day. A family that serves twelve people during a meal earns about 72.00 Euro. However, pensioners who only show guests their fruit garden are compensated with 30.00 Euro.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to use a small portion of the income from tourism to build up reserves in the framework of the association. These reserves could for instance be used for investments in the community, which would facilitate the expansion of the services offered and provide network members who are not doing so well with a chance for a balanced participation in the development of services.

The involvement of women in the programme of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA is especially impressive: Women, for the most part, are the ones who welcome and attend on the guests. Moreover, they not only entertain the visitors, but also eloquently explain the fundamental idea that originally led to the founding of the project: The safeguarding of their family life through conservation of the traditional agriculture and local culture.

Altogether, revenues in the amount of 20,000.00 Euro are expected in 2006.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reinforcement of the local culture as well as the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas</b></p>
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In addition to the economic considerations, an essential motive which led to the foundation of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA was the initiators' wish to strengthen the local customs through an agro-tourism project while also promoting appreciation for the traditional rural way of life and the preservation of the agricultural products of the area. The project attempts to thwart a rural exodus and migration of young people into the cities.

The programme of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA undoubtedly has an educational effect on the children of the network members, since they themselves actively participate in it (i.e. they take part in the "colourful" evenings, wear traditional costumes, and sing and dance with their parents and guests). They thus experience not only the appreciation of their parents and grandparents, but primarily that of the guests. They learn that the life of a small farmer has value.

The folklore of the "Gauchos" (the Argentine cowboys) is also preserved in this context, although the indigenous people here are not cattle breeders. This, too, is an Argentine tradition in which the people's

own cultural identity is manifested. On festive occasions therefore, (Gaucho-) costumes, which vary from region to region, are worn. Every year, a great festival is staged in San Carlos, in which the "Valores Departamentales y Provinciales" (the "values of the region and the province") are displayed in a lively folklore and celebrated through dance contests, music presentations and various awards.

**Avoidance or minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas**

The number of visitors has increased steadily in previous years. While the programme of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA attracted only about 100 guests in 2004, in 2005 it already had 250 visitors, and nearly 400 guests are expected for 2006. Ninety percent are foreigners. The aforementioned German tour operator (Aventoura), which allocated almost 200 customers in 2006 alone, expects further growth of 15 percent per year. This operator has meanwhile included CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA in two of its South American programmes.

With the current number of network members the capacity limit is not yet reached. It is determined from the maximum number of guests that can be accommodated without jeopardising the family life and the members' livelihood, i.e. agriculture. The network members see a limit with three groups per week. Currently a group of up to 20 people can participate in the programme.

The question arises as to whether the repetition of the programme would not gradually lead to routine and signs of sluggishness in the long run leading to the foreigners becoming a strain on the families. This idea was vehemently opposed by a few women who were asked about the possibility of the current refreshing warmth and hospitality of network members turning into a burden for them. The response was that the guests in no way represent a burden, that their presence is a welcome relief from the daily routine, and that new things are always to be learned from the foreigners, that they also like to dance and celebrate frequently even without them.

**Projects and measures entered into the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility**

In addition to the socially responsible development of the services being offered, a product was developed with CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA that is absolutely in line with the principles of environmental compatibility.

The guests are supplied exclusively with agricultural products from the families' own production. No foreign products are sold, and only self-produced products are marketed (high local economic added value and avoidance of environmental damage through transport of imported goods).

The inhabitants of La Consulta live in an oasis surrounded by a steppe. With one exception, this has led to the absence of parasites so that the agricultural products need not be sprayed with insecticides. Care is also taken to ensure that no parasites are introduced into the region. The people are aware of the danger of possible detrimental environmental impacts.

The intent is not to accommodate particularly demanding tourists, but rather modest guests who are able to manage with the simple comfort being offered. In short, guests who need air conditioning and a television set in their room are probably in the wrong place. In this way, excessive energy consumption as a result of tourism operations can be avoided.

As mentioned above in the programme description, the remaining programme components, such as the choice of transport for the guests (horses, sulky, bicycles), tours showing the importance of the water in the valley, and the manufacture of ceramics in the traditional kilns, do not present a danger to the environment.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What measures or mechanisms assure the economic and institutional sustainability of the project?</b></p>
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CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA is doing its best in trying to win over other tour operators as a way of increasing the income from agro-tourism and reduce the current great dependency on the one and only German travel agency. Efforts are being made to spread the concept to other communities, and by doing so to advertise and promote the marketing for local agricultural products.

In the future the network members want to promote the national family tourism and are therefore trying to attract vacationers from the cities. Therefore one advertises with the slogan "Holiday in the countryside". The project is indeed very well suited for families with children.

CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA is represented at the relevant trade and tourism fairs in Cordoba and Buenos Aires with the aim of reaching this kind of customer. A small brochure was prepared, in which the network presents itself and its members. As mentioned previously, CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA has the support of the local media in its public relations work, as well as of the city of San Carlos and the National Agricultural Institute INTA.

There are plans of achieving greater integration of the visitors into the agricultural activities, as well as an improvement of the services offered so far and of the quality of handcrafted objects as well as for continuous monitoring.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA has brought tourism into a rural area of Argentina that is otherwise considered to be a transit area for tourists travelling on "Ruta 40", the legendary road along the Andes, which connects the outermost northern part of the country with the outermost south of Argentina for a stretch of several thousand kilometres.

A couple of families developed a small project in La Consulta, which presents an interesting facet of the variety of tourist operations for travellers as well as tour operators, and which is well recommended for integration into an Argentinean programme.

Those who book the programme of CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA, encounter warm and cordial people who take very good care of their guests, accompany them during their visit and allow the guests to partake in their daily life for a short time. The tourist group, which the appraiser accompanied, was exceptionally impressed by their experiences, the zest for life, and the unaffected cordiality of the hostesses.

The TODO! award for CAMINOS DE ALTAMIRA is herewith strongly recommended.

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