

Sustainable Development and Tourism in Central America

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根岸奈未（経済学部 3 年）

指導教員：ロジャー・バティ教授

This paper analyzes one possible framework for cooperation towards economic growth in Central America. My focus is on tourism and environment, and how it contributes to the sustainable development of the region. The countries that would be discussed are Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize. These countries have, I argue, a shared destiny. Though diverse in many aspects, they nevertheless share many common traits. In the future, amongst these will be a marked reliance on tourism. Central America seems to be forgotten from the world news, compared with other Latin American countries that are getting attention from the developed countries in recent days. This paper is aimed to give attention to the region that has not earned enough attention they deserve.

1. Introduction: Why Central America Now?

Chapter 1 explains the reason this paper focuses on Central America and the possibility it has as ecotourism destination. The chapter is divided into five sections: geographical characteristics, historical background, relation with the United States, current economic condition, and possibility as ecotourism destination. As a region connected, Central America holds many in common in geographical and historical means, but when seen as individual countries, many characteristics stand out. Taking these in account, this paper argues that the shared key to future development for Central America is tourism, especially ecotourism.

2. Factors Behind Costa Rica' s Success

Chapter 2 introduces the case of Costa Rica's tourism and analyzes the keys to its success. Costa Rica wasn't prosperous from the beginning; rather it was the poorest country in Central America. But now, it is famous for

ecotourism on a global scale, and is one of the leading developing countries of Central America. There are three key factors of Costa Rica's success as a pioneer of ecotourism: effort by the government and the people, disarmament, and the unique population characteristics. Although gaining the fame as the Green Republic, there are challenges Costa Rica is facing, and these will be discussed in this chapter as well.

3. Difficulties in Applying the "success model"

Although being a great role model of development, Costa Rica's tourism success story seems to be a distinctive one, and no other Central American countries have followed the footsteps. Chapter 3 investigates the problems Central American countries have in applying the model of success. The chapter is broken into three parts: the need of social security, the environmental threat, and the reality of bringing in tourists.

4. Questions for the Future

This paper has succeeded in bringing out the broad image of Central America's future. On the other hand, reality and details were left behind, making my point sound like fantasy. The final chapter will put forward a proposal and further thoughts in making tourism a framework for sustainable development of Central American countries. Future subject would be to do detailed research on individual countries of Central America, and investigate the feasibility of the proposed framework.