

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**



**TITLE:
DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE TOURISM, A STRATEGIC BUSINESS PROFILE OF THE
TOUR OPERATOR *ECHO JOURNEYS* FOR DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING
TRAVELERS IN EL SALVADOR.**

**DISEÑO DE TURISMO ACCESIBLE, PERFIL ESTRATÉGICO DE NEGOCIO DE LA
TOUR OPERADORA *ECHO JOURNEYS* PARA VIAJEROS CON COMPETENCIAS
ESPECIALES AUDITIVAS EN EL SALVADOR.**

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ABSTRACT

This project addresses the critical issue of accessibility and inclusivity within the tourism sector in El Salvador, particularly for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The study's primary objective was to develop a comprehensive and viable business profile for Echo Journeys, a specialized tour operator to offer accessible hiking and cultural experiences in natural reserves in El Salvador. The research employs a descriptive and conceptual design approach, leveraging a theoretical framework on sustainable tourism service quality, and empirical evidence collected during field trips. The analysis successfully established a detailed product profile, defined core operational elements, and created a strategic blueprint for the company's launch and growth, detailing its market niche, mission, and unique value proposition on sign language communication. The central conclusion is that the proposed inclusive operating model is structurally sound, economically viable, and represents a significant, sustainable competitive advantage that directly supports social equity goals within the Salvadoran tourism industry.

Keywords: Accessible Tourism, Sustainability, Deaf Community, Ecotourism, Service Design

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has solidified its role as a major driver of global economic growth and a critical mechanism for promoting cross-cultural understanding. However, as the sector matures, there is an escalating imperative to shift toward inclusive and accessible models that address the needs of all potential travelers. This necessity is particularly acute in experiential tourism, such as hiking and nature exploration, where barriers related to communication and physical access often exclude individuals from the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. This final project directly addresses this gap by focusing on the conceptual development of a specialized tour operation in El Salvador.

This research focuses on detailing the Profile of a specialized Tour Operator dedicated to providing inclusive hiking and nature immersion experiences. The proposed operator targets travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing, organizing tours to El Salvador's protected areas, including national parks, natural reserves, lakes, and waterfalls. The core value proposition involves utilizing sign language and assistive technology to ensure comprehensive communication and a deep, personal connection with the natural environment. The primary objective of this project is to apply principles of service quality, local development, and sustainable management to create a viable and socially responsible business model, demonstrating how inclusive tourism can unlock new market potential and promote social equity within the industry.

The methodology for this study is descriptive and exploratory, grounded in a detailed theoretical review of tourism, accessible tourism, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. Data gathered through four comprehensive field trips to the designated natural and historical sites in El Salvador provided essential empirical evidence, which helped to define the product's quality attributes, operational logistics, and resource

requirements. The scope of this work focuses on business profiling, the development of core operational elements, and the preliminary assessment of the local development and sustainability impact, establishing a strategic blueprint for the tour operation.

This work consists of three chapters. Chapter I: Profile of a Tourist Product or Service introduces the specialized tour operator, defining its objectives, justification, and detailed product description. Chapter II: Elements for the Design of a Tourist Product or Service provides the necessary historical, cultural, and resource context, including a preliminary action plan and quality plan. Chapter III: Local Development through a Tourist Product or Service, focuses on the business aspects, detailing the entrepreneur profile, market niche, mission, vision, values, logo, and slogan of the tour operator. The document concludes with the Conclusions, followed by the Appendices, which contain visual evidence from the essential field trips.

CHAPTER I

PROFILE OF A TOURIST PRODUCT OR SERVICE

1.1 Chapter Overview

The necessity for specialized and inclusive tourism models has become a central focus within the global travel industry. This section establishes the context for the development of Echo Journeys; a tour operator dedicated to inclusive tourism experiences for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. In tourism, accessibility is not always a priority for all travelers, a deficit that particularly affects the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. As Judith Heumann once noted, "Part of the problem is that we tend to think that equality is about treating everyone the same, when it's not. It's about fairness. It's about equity of access." People with hearing loss face challenges that extend beyond the physical disability itself; societal attitudes and a lack of understanding can lead to feelings of isolation and impede full participation in cultural and natural heritage experiences. This chapter, therefore, begins the essential process of designing an operator committed to breaking down these barriers.

To bridge this gap, Echo Journeys emerges to provide accessible and inclusive travel experiences tailored to this community. The operator promotes equal access and enjoyment of El Salvador's breathtaking sights and cultural heritage. From the lush greenery of its forests to the serene beauty of its lakes, the country offers a variety of spectacular sights that will delight travelers of all abilities. An essential aspect of inclusive tourism services is the commitment to eliminating communication barriers for guests and creating a space where people with hearing loss can openly address their individual needs—such as charging their hearing aids or avoiding activities that could cause damage—without shame. By acknowledging the diverse spectrum of experiences associated with hearing loss, the operator can effectively tailor the service to meet specific needs and ensure a seamless, enjoyable journey for all.

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of Echo Journeys' objectives, justification, service description, service qualities, tourism typologies, and commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, all of which contribute to the operator's position as a leader in inclusive tourism.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

To facilitate access to meaningful tourist experiences in the nature, history, and culture of El Salvador for individuals with varying degrees of hearing loss through an inclusive operating model that enriches the knowledge of all visitors and fosters more equitable tourism.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- a. To adopt an accessible range of tourist services incorporating visual communication strategies, specialized guides, and technological resources to ensure an enriching and comprehensible experience for individuals with hearing loss.
- b. To establish strategic alliances with key stakeholders in the tourism sector in El Salvador (e.g., tour guides, establishment owners, and local authorities) to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive tourism and ensure the implementation of accessible practices in service provision.
- c. To develop a marketing strategy that highlights the tour operator's unique value proposition for the hearing loss segment, utilizing accessible channels and messages to effectively reach this audience nationally and internationally. This will increase the visibility of El Salvador as an inclusive tourist destination.

1.3 Justification

Tourism generates economic development and promotes social inclusion and personal well-being. However, in El Salvador, there are still significant limitations that prevent certain groups, such as people with hearing disabilities, from fully participating in tourism experiences. The lack of communicative accessibility, trained guides, and appropriate materials are barriers that hinder their integration in this field.

This project aims to offer an inclusive tourism service specifically designed for people with hearing loss who experience different degrees of hearing impairment and often use hearing aids to improve their hearing. Through guided tours, visual materials, sign language interpreters, and other adapted tools, the goal is to create safe, accessible, and meaningful experiences that respond to their specific needs.

This project also helps people understand why inclusion matters in tourism. It encourages respect for all kinds of people and shows everyone deserves to enjoy travel experiences. It also creates chances to work together with organizations that support people with hearing disabilities and care about making things more accessible.

Therefore, this project is not only important for tourism but also has educational and social value. It helps meet a real need that our country frequently overlooks. At the same time, it helps show that El Salvador can become a more welcoming and inclusive place for everyone who wants to travel and explore.

1.4 Description of the Tourist Product or Service

The tour operator is in San Salvador, El Salvador. It offers inclusive tourism services for deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers with experiential and cultural tours. The touristic services include activities such as guided tours of protected natural reserves, local farms, interaction with local communities, cultural events, and outdoor activities. The commitment lies in the deep understanding of the destinations visited, thereby guaranteeing a truly immersive and memorable experience for all clients. This is achieved because the services promote responsible tourism and provide an inclusive experience that celebrates diversity and fosters cross-cultural understanding.

1.4.1 Tourist Service Name

The name of the tour operator is Echo Journeys. The choice of this name was made carefully, as it precisely encapsulates the essence of the operator's value proposition and mission.

The word Echo carries multiple powerful meanings central to the service philosophy:

First, it subtly and positively alludes to sound and accessible communication. For the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, the term speaks to the resonance of connection facilitated through specialized communication, such as sign language, ensuring every voice is understood on its own terms.

Second, Echo represents the resonance of history and culture. When destinations like El Salvador's ancient ruins, historic churches, and vibrant towns are visited, the experiences reflect the echoes of past civilizations and enduring traditions.

Third, it symbolizes the lasting impact of unforgettable experiences. The beauty of nature—its forests, volcanoes, rivers, and beaches—leaves an echo in memory, a profound impression that stays with the client long after the journey ends.

The word Journeys speaks directly to the transformative adventures crafted by the operator. These are characterized not merely as trips, but as personal explorations, discoveries, and meaningful connections that create lasting echoes in the client's life.

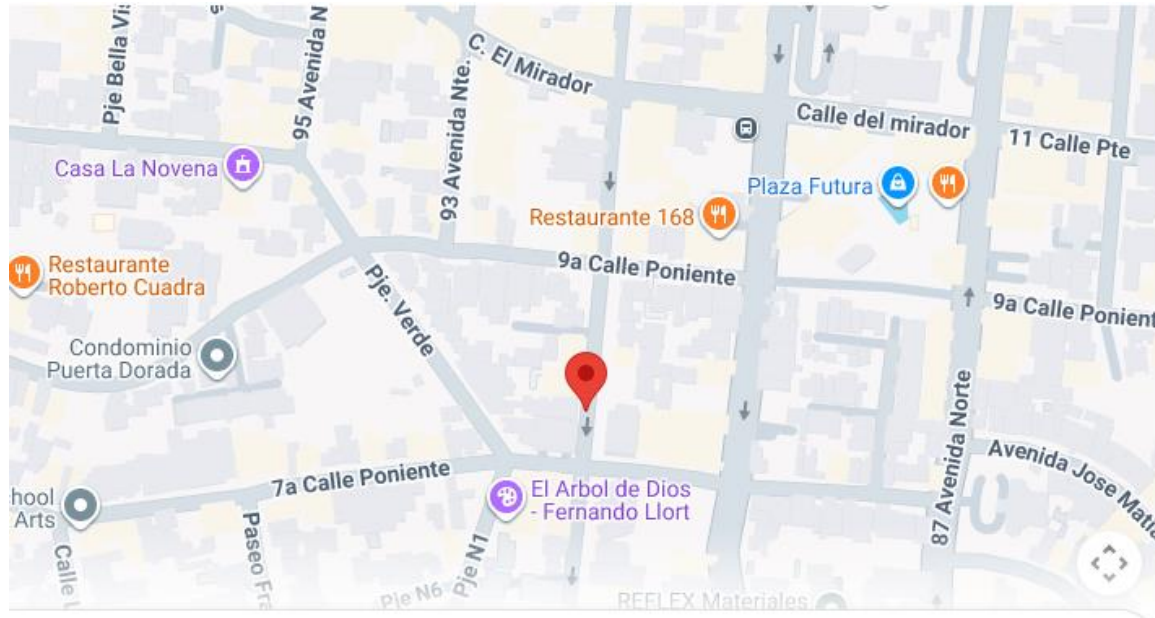
Together, Echo Journeys signifies the commitment of the tour operator to providing accessible, enriching experiences where every traveler can deeply connect with the world around them, making memories that resonate.

1.4.2 Location

The headquarters of Echo Journeys are strategically located in the Colonia Escalón district of San Salvador, El Salvador, at 91st Avenue North, 7th Street West, #532. Situated on a prominent corner, this central position offers optimal access to major urban transportation routes and is in proximity to key commercial landmarks such as the World Trade Center and the Crowne Plaza hotel. From this convenient location, the operator handles all administrative and logistical processes for each tour, ensuring that every detail is secured before the guests begin their journey. The location facilitates easy coordination with urban partners and provides a professional base for operations.

Figure 1.1

Geographical Location of Echo Journeys Headquarters, Colonia Escalón.



Note. Map showing the intersection of 91st Avenue North and 7th Street West, San Salvador (The location of the headquarters). Adapted from Google Maps.

1.4.3 Type of Touristic Service

Echo Journeys provides specialized inclusive tourism services for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, featuring customized tours that prioritize communication accessibility, sensory experiences, and cultural understanding. The operator's tours cater to a variety of needs, allowing deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers to experience the best of El Salvador and beyond without the communication barriers that can often exist in traditional tour experiences.

Traditional tour experiences often present communication barriers for deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers, such as a lack of sign language interpreters, inaccessible communication devices, and inadequate visual communication strategies. At Echo Journeys, the model is committed to breaking down these barriers and ensuring that guests can fully participate in every aspect of

their tour. To ensure seamless communication throughout the tours, trained interpreters fluent in both American Sign Language (ASL) and Salvadoran Sign Language (also known as Lengua de Señas de El Salvador or LESSA) are provided, as well as specialized communication devices, such as vibrating alarms and visual notifications. The guides possess the knowledge to utilize visual aids, such as gestures and writing, to ensure all guests can follow along and participate effectively in the tours. While the services prioritize accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers, the operator also recognizes that some individuals with hearing loss may prefer verbal communication using spoken language. Therefore, multilingual guides fluent in English, French, and Spanish are also offered. Whether guests communicate in their native language or desire an immersive cultural experience, the guides facilitate meaningful interactions that enrich the travel experience for all participants. The guiding team is friendly and knowledgeable, ensuring an inclusive, memorable, and satisfying experience for every guest.

Echo Journeys welcomes deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers, including adults (18+) and children with their parents, as well as their family, friends, and anyone interested in experiencing the deaf community. The operator is committed to providing an inclusive and safe travel experience for all guests, with customized tours and accommodations to suit their individual needs and preferences, whether they are a solo traveler seeking adventure, a group of friends seeking new experiences, a family looking for a memorable vacation, or simply someone wanting to learn more about the deaf community. Echo Journeys offers its inclusive tours to national and international travelers, with tailored itineraries and accommodations to suit the specific needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing guests and their families and friends. As a tour operator serving deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers, Echo Journeys uses a personalized, hands-on approach to planning each tour. The staff works closely with guests to ensure that every aspect of

their trip is accessible and enjoyable, from transportation and accommodations to activities and dining options. The tour operator specializes in tours highlighting El Salvador's rich natural beauty and archeological heritage, from the serene landscapes of its rainforests and coastal regions to the ancient ruins that dot the country. Echo Journeys offers tours prioritizing a calm and immersive exploration of El Salvador's cultural and historical sites, providing clients with an authentic and memorable experience. The itineraries are carefully crafted to provide a balanced mix of activities, from relaxing nature walks and visits to archeological sites to cultural experiences and interactions with local communities. The goal is to create a memorable journey that showcases the diverse facets of El Salvador, with each day offering a new and engaging experience for guests. Care is taken to balance activity and relaxation, allowing guests to fully appreciate the natural and cultural wonders of El Salvador without feeling rushed or overwhelmed.

1.4.4 Activities

Among the exciting activities that Echo Journeys offers, travelers can enjoy:

1. Hiking through lush national parks like Bosque El Imposible and Montecristo or scaling volcanoes and hills for stunning views.
2. Travelers can also cool off with a refreshing swim in rivers and waterfalls, such as the ones found in the scenic Montecristo National Park, where they can hike to stunning vistas and dip in the refreshing waters.
3. Exploring ancient ruins like San Andrés and Joya de Cerén, learning about the rich history of indigenous peoples, and appreciating the well-preserved archaeological treasures.

4. Visits to local farms provide an authentic glimpse into Salvadoran agriculture and the art of sustainable farming practices. Guests can learn about traditional methods of cultivating coffee, cacao, and other crops and even participate in harvesting and tasting fresh produce straight from the source.
5. Travelers can stroll through quaint, traditional towns with cobblestone streets, savor local cuisine in picturesque restaurants, or visit lively food festivals to sample authentic Salvadoran flavors.
6. The tours prioritize cultural interactions with local communities, such as workshops where travelers can learn about traditional artisanal crafts and create their own. These exchanges allow travelers to connect to El Salvador's rich heritage, providing meaningful experiences beyond simply visiting landmarks and attractions.
7. Echo Journeys wants to foster cultural exchanges between deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. For example, during tours that visit the charming towns of El Salvador, travelers from other countries can interact with members of the Salvadoran deaf community, sharing their respective cultures, languages, and experiences.
8. Echo Journeys also include unique activities, like guided meditation in a rainforest, to help the guests find peace and serenity in nature, reflecting Echo Journeys commitment to well-being and holistic travel experiences.
9. For thrill-seekers, Echo Journeys can arrange thrilling experiences such as canopy (ziplining), rappel, wakeboarding, parasailing, and other heart-pumping activities to satisfy your need for excitement.
10. For a more tranquil yet thrilling experience, Echo Journeys can organize boat rides on local lakes, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, and other aquatic activities.

With a wide range of activities that prioritize accessibility, cultural understanding, and meaningful interactions with the environment, Echo Journeys offers a truly unique and unforgettable travel experience for deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers, their companions, and anyone seeking a deep connection with the beautiful country of El Salvador.

1.4.5 Service Qualities

Echo Journeys is a tour operator that strives to provide high-quality services to its clients. The operator's service qualities are summarized across seven key areas: genuine inclusion, deep destination knowledge, safety and well-being, proactive problem-solving, personalization and flexible adaptation, responsible community engagement, uncompromised quality. These qualities are developed to ensure that clients have the best possible experience and that they come away with a deep appreciation for the destinations visited. This unique approach to tourism sets the operator apart from other tour operators and provides the clients with an unforgettable and significant travel experience. The seven core service qualities are detailed as follows:

1. **Genuine Inclusion.** Echo Journeys is committed to genuine inclusion in every aspect of its tours. Each experience is designed from the ground up to ensure equal participation for deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers. The operator creates customizable itineraries and barrier-free communication strategies to break down the barriers that often exist in traditional travel experiences.
2. **Deep Destination Knowledge and Specialized Team.** Echo Journeys effectively combines in-depth knowledge of its destinations with a specialized understanding of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community's needs, ensuring the tours are both immersive and accessible. The professional team possesses both tourism expertise and the necessary sensitivity for serving the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Tour guides are

proficient in sign language and expertly interpret the wealth of history and culture at each destination, utilizing a mix of visual aids, tactile experiences, and personalized interaction to guarantee that all travelers feel connected to El Salvador's rich heritage.

3. **Safety and Well-being.** Echo Journeys places a premium on the safety and well-being of guests, ensuring they are informed about their itineraries, local conditions, accommodations, and recommended safety precautions. Detailed information is provided on the operator's website, travel insurance is recommended, and constant contact is maintained with travelers to ensure they feel secure during their journeys. The dedication to safety extends to the specific needs of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, which includes arranging accessible transportation and identifying emergency evacuation routes for travelers with limited mobility.
4. **Proactive Problem Solving.** On Echo Journeys' tours, proactive problem solving is paramount. The operator is always ready to address unexpected situations, from delays to disruptions. Swift, personalized assistance is offered, employing communication strategies to ensure guests receive the help they require. Expertise with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community's communication preferences, from sign language to visual aids, allows the team to swiftly respond to emergencies while maintaining a clear, accessible information flow.
5. **Personalization and Flexible Adaptation.** Echo Journeys provides personalized, flexible tours that cater to a diverse range of travelers preferences. Itineraries can be tailored to suit various group compositions, from families with children to groups of friends, ensuring that Deaf and hearing travelers journey together seamlessly.

Furthermore, itineraries are adapted to align with specific budgets, making the tours accessible and affordable to a wide range of travelers.

6. **Responsible Community Engagement.** Echo Journeys believes in tourism that benefits the local communities visited. The operator promotes activities that involve direct interaction with local people and their culture, such as visits to markets, homestays, and cultural workshops. These types of experiences enrich the traveler's understanding of El Salvador while supporting the local economy and promoting cross-cultural exchange.
7. **Uncompromised Quality.** At Echo Journeys, mediocrity is not accepted. The operator is dedicated to delivering a travel experience that is not only enjoyable and engaging but also memorable and enriching. To ensure an exceptional travel experience, the operator carefully selects the accommodations, transport services, and restaurants utilized, favoring local businesses that reflect the true spirit of El Salvador.

1.4.6 Tourism Typologies

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), various tourism typologies exist, each offering a unique experience for travelers. The Tour Operator Echo Journeys encompasses several of these typologies, including:

- **Inclusive or Accessible Tourism.** Defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as the creation of tourism environments, products, and services that enable all people to participate fully and on equal terms. The UNWTO emphasizes not only the importance of physical accessibility, but also the need to consider intellectual, sensory, and social aspects to ensure a complete tourism experience for all. Echo Journeys embraces inclusive tourism by ensuring the tours are accessible to Deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers. The staff and guides of the tour operator are trained in sign language

and are proficient in non-verbal communication. By prioritizing accessibility, Echo Journeys create a welcoming environment for all, fostering greater inclusivity and diversity in the tourism industry.

- **Ecotourism.** It focuses on travels to natural areas and emphasizes environmental protection and local community involvement. Echo Journeys is committed to minimizing the impact on nature and promoting responsible tourism and environmental conservation.
- **Mountain tourism.** It involves traveling to destinations characterized by mountainous landscapes, such as Santa Ana Volcano or Pital and Eramon hills. This type of tourism is not about adventure activities but rather about enjoying the natural beauty of the environment, such as hiking in the mountains or simply admiring the scenery. Mountain tourism experiences offer to the clients a chance to connect meaningfully with the environment while they enjoy the unique landscapes and natural beauty of El Salvador.
- **Adventure Tourism.** This type of tourism refers to travels that involve a variety of physical activities, usually in natural environments. It is popular among travelers who seek excitement and a sense of challenge. Echo Journeys offers several adventure tourism activities, such as rock climbing, zip-lining, and hiking, all designed to allow deaf and hard-of-hearing travelers to explore the natural world and experience the thrill of adventure.
- **Cultural tourism.** It is a type of travel that focuses on experiencing and appreciating the traditions, art, history, and culture of a particular destination. This type of tourism is popular among travelers who want to learn about and immerse themselves in a different culture. Echo Journeys offers a range of cultural tourism experiences that showcase the unique traditions and cultures of the destinations visited.

- **Gastronomic tourism.** It involves traveling to a destination specifically to experience its local cuisine. It can include enjoying meals, visiting markets and restaurants, learning to cook traditional dishes, or participating in food festivals and events. Echo Journeys emphasizes gastronomic tourism on their trips, as it provides a unique and immersive way to engage with local culture.
- **Coastal, Maritime, and Inland Water Tourism.** This type of tourism encompasses all activities related to water, including coastal tourism (beach vacations), maritime tourism (cruises), and inland water tourism (river cruises, boat tours, water sports). Echo Journeys offers a range of water-based experiences for the travelers, such as boat tours of Lake Güija to view its stunning islands and whale-watching tours in the Pacific Ocean.

1.5 Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 global goals established by the United Nations to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

Figure 1.2

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Applied to Tourism



Note. Design adapted using Canva.

Echo Journeys is committed to supporting the SDGs through our tourism practices, including:

- **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.** Echo Journeys aligns with SDG 8:

Decent Work and Economic Growth by offering fair employment opportunities to local

guides, interpreters, and transportation providers. This enables Echo Journeys to support local economies and promote economic growth in the visited regions.

- **SDG 10: Reduce Inequality.** Echo Journeys contributes to SDG 10: Reduced Inequality by promoting inclusivity and accessibility in tourism. The deaf-friendly tour packages provide equal opportunities for travelers with diverse auditory perceptions, breaking down barriers and fostering a culture of inclusion.
- **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.** Echo Journeys supports SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by promoting respectful and mutually beneficial engagement between travelers and local communities. Its tours encourage traveler participation in activities, such as community service projects, which directly support the local population and contribute to the development of thriving, sustainable communities.
- **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.** Echo Journeys adheres to SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production by promoting sustainable tourism models. This involves minimizing waste, conserving resources, and ensuring that the tourism practices are environmentally and culturally responsible. For instance, Echo Journeys prioritize eco-friendly transportation and lodging options, encouraging the use of reusable water bottles, reducing single-use plastics, and advocating for the sustainable use of natural resources.
- **SDG 15: Life on Land.** Echo Journeys contributes to SDG 15: Life on Land by prioritizing ecotourism activities that promote conservation and biodiversity protection. Its guided hikes and nature walks through forests and volcanoes raise awareness of El Salvador's unique ecosystems, encouraging travelers to understand and appreciate the importance of preserving these natural environments.

Echo Journeys' commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism practices aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. By prioritizing inclusivity, community engagement, resource conservation, and biodiversity protection, it strives to create meaningful travel experiences that contribute to the development of communities in El Salvador.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND COMPONENTS FOR TOURIST PRODUCT OR SERVICE DESIGN

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter establishes the essential referential and contextual framework that underpins the design of the proposed tourism service. The main objective is to compile and analyze the historical, cultural, and geographical background indispensable for developing a responsible and attractive tourism proposal in El Salvador.

The analysis focuses on a select group of eight natural resources that will serve as the pillars of the tourism offering: El Boquerón, La Puerta del Diablo, Ecoparque El Espino, El Imposible National Park, Montecristo National Park, El Cerro Verde Natural Park, Los Tercios Waterfall, and Lake Güija.

The chapter develops six thematic sections. It begins with an overview of the History of Tourism (general and in El Salvador), providing the evolutionary context of the sector. Subsequently, a detailed characterization of the eight selected natural resources is provided, including their strategic location on the national tourism map. The review then extends to Cultural Identity and Intangible Resources, where the analysis is conducted specifically for each destination, integrating the local legends, histories, and traditions of El Boquerón, La Puerta del Diablo, and other sites, based on their relevance to the visitor experience. Finally, the Principles for Sustainable Tourism and the basic components of a Strategic Plan (action, quality control, and customer satisfaction) are defined. This comprehensive review aims to establish the theoretical and investigative foundation for developing the value proposition and its strategic application.

2.2 The History of Tourism

Humans have traveled since ancient times for various reasons, such as religion, trade, and elite leisure, as the ancient Greeks and Romans did. However, the concept of tourism as a massive leisure activity is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to researchers Faraldo and Rodríguez-López (2013), the academic study of tourism is also a young discipline. While travel has a long history, the historical analysis of mass tourism has been considered too "trivial" by many. Nevertheless, tourism has become a vital global phenomenon, with a significant impact on millions of people, making its study crucial for understanding modern society.

The definition of the term "tourism" is complex, as the word itself is a modern concept. Although the activity of traveling for pleasure has existed since antiquity, the word to describe the mass phenomenon did not become popular in most Western languages until after 1945. A look at its etymology demonstrates this recent origin: the word tourism first appeared in English in 1800, and the term "turismo" was included in the Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary in its 1925 edition. It shows that while the act of travel is ancient, the concept of tourism is a very recent phenomenon (Faraldo and Rodríguez-López, 2013).

In the 1930s, the theorist Arthur Bormann¹ defined tourism as the set of temporary trips made for pleasure, leisure, or business, if they were not for commuting. In 1942, pioneers Walter Hunziker² and Kurt Krapf³ added the concept that tourism is the set of relationships and phenomena produced by people traveling and staying outside their home for non-lucrative reasons (Escola Universitària Mediterrani, n.d.).

Over time, these definitions evolved to classify travelers more precisely. Currently, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) distinguishes between a tourist (or overnight visitor), who stays at least one night in a destination, and an excursionist (or day-tripper), who returns to their place of origin without staying the night. This approach highlights the importance of the overnight stay to differentiate the type of visitor (Reali, 2022).

Therefore, while the precise definition and study of tourism are modern phenomena that crystallized in the 20th century, it is essential to trace the deep roots of human travel. These early expeditions, although driven by survival, trade, or religion rather than modern leisure, established the foundations of infrastructure, movement patterns, and cultural exchange that would eventually evolve into the global tourism sector we know today.

¹ Arthur Bormann was a prominent theorist from the German School of tourism studies. He is recognized as one of the pioneering researchers in the field of tourism economics.

² Walter Hunziker was a prominent Swiss professor and economist, considered one of the founding fathers of modern tourism science. He defined tourism from a socioeconomic perspective.

³ Kurt Krapf was a prominent scholar and pioneer in modern tourism science. He was instrumental in the transition of tourism from a commercial activity to an academic and scientific conceptualization during the mid-20th century.

2.2.1 Travel in Antiquity

Ancient history refers to the period in which scientists have found the earliest remains of human activity and ends with the fall of significant empires, such as the Western Roman Empire (Christou, 2022). The modern concept of tourism, understood as a journey for leisure and pleasure, is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history. Unlike current travels, ancient expeditions were motivated by reasons of survival, conquest, or necessity (D'angour, 2023). During ancient times, people traveled for various reasons, mainly for migration and military purposes. Other drivers included trade, spectacle games, and religious reasons, such as the case of Greek pilgrimages to sacred sites (Christou, 2022). The experience of traveling in ancient Greece and Rome was often an exclusive privilege for soldiers, colonists seeking new settlements, or merchants. Travel conditions were rudimentary and dangerous, whether walking on unpaved roads or sailing in fragile boats, according to the poet Hesiod, which made shipwrecks a constant fear for sailors (D'Angour, 2023).

To examine travel in antiquity, we can begin with Ancient Egypt, one of the first civilizations to record the mobility of its people.

2.2.1.1 Egyptians

The ancient travels of Egyptians were not random; they were always motivated by a clear purpose and had a fixed destination (Hays, 2018). While military and commercial expeditions were the main drivers, textual evidence reveals a variety of underlying motivations (Hays, 2018). The first evidence of travel as a social right emerges in ancient texts, which emphasize the importance of justice for travelers, such as the right to a spot in a boat for those who could not afford one (Zakaria, 2024). Other motives for travel included religious pilgrimages and the demonstration of social status (Zakaria, 2024). Furthermore, curiosity was also a documented driver of travel, as evidenced by inscriptions visitors made in temples like the Temple of Philae.⁴ In fact, travelers left their names, ranks, and titles engraved to record their visit. It shows an early sense of traveler responsibility, with regulations that guided visitors and warnings, sometimes in the form of curses, to prevent them from damaging monuments or erasing the engravings (Zakaria, 2024).

Although early evidence often associates travel with the elite, such as wealthy citizens who visited the tombs of their ancestors, mobility was a much more widespread phenomenon in ancient Egypt. Travelers had a different range of professions and social strata, including merchants, messengers, military personnel, architects, and doctors (Hays, 2018). Records show that even lower social classes, such as unskilled workers recruited for the construction of pyramids, were part of this group of travelers. Most journeys were for official duty, often ruled by the pharaoh, illustrating the functional nature of travel (Hays, 2018).

⁴ The Temple of Philae was a prominent religious complex of Ancient Egypt, located on the Nile River and primarily dedicated to the goddess Isis. It was built during the Ptolemaic dynasty, beginning around 690 B.C. Currently, it is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Figure 2.1

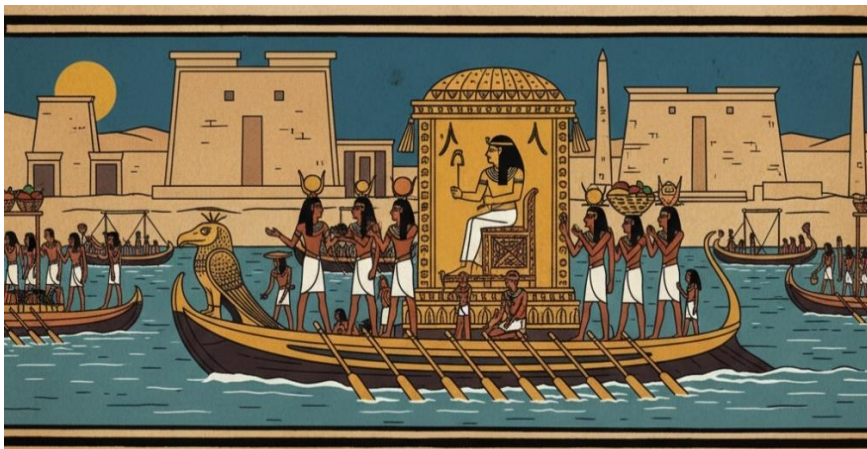
Land Caravan Journey in Ancient Egypt



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "Ancient Egyptians traveling by land, in the style of their own drawings, no text, representing a commercial caravan" (2025, August 20).

Figure 2.2

Boat Travel in Ancient Egypt

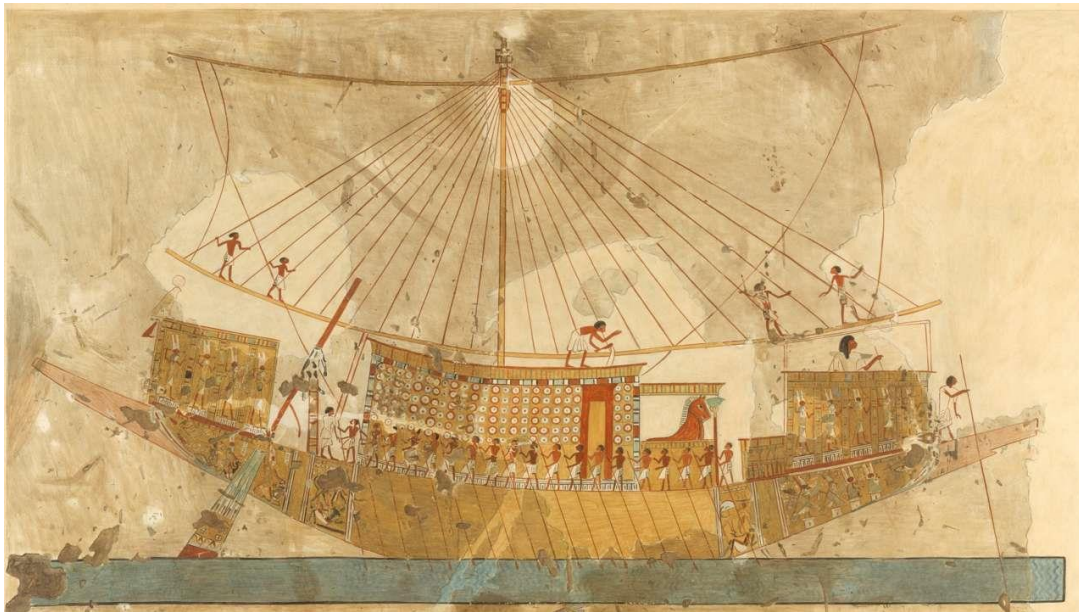


Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "Ancient Egyptians traveling by boat, in the style of their own drawings, no text, representing a ceremonial or pilgrimage journey" (2025, August 20).

The ancient Egyptians developed a transportation network that relied heavily on boats and ships, with the Nile River serving as their principal transportation route. On land, they used animals such as oxen and donkeys. Although desert caravans were less common, carts, chariots, sleds, and chairs were used (Explore Luxor, n.d.). In terms of accommodation, travelers found lodging in primitive wind huts or tents. Relay stations also provided food and refreshed horses for messengers. While travelers carried their own provisions, they also depended on a chain of water depots along desert tracks and on the hospitality of residents for food and water (Hays, 2018).

Figure 2.3

The Importance of Watercraft in the Egyptian Transportation Network: Viceroy's Ship (Fresco, c. 1353–1327 B.C.)



Note. Reprinted from Mascort (2024). The original fresco is housed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2.4

Chariot Design and Land Transport in Ancient Egypt



Note. Reprinted from Hays (2024b).

Beyond the banks of the Nile, travel in other civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, served similar purposes, even if the infrastructure and social organization differed.

2.2.1.2 Mesopotamians

In Mesopotamia, traveling had cultural and religious motivations. Sites like the great ziggurat of Ur attracted pilgrims from across the region, who brought offerings and participated in ceremonies (Maribel, n.d.). The legacy of ancient travel also includes the ornamental gardens that rulers cultivated for their own enjoyment and their guests (Christou, 2022). In Babylon, royalty and Assyrians planted gardens in temples and palaces, recreating their concept of "paradise." The most famous, the so-called Hanging Gardens of Babylon, are believed to have been the palace gardens of an Assyrian king located in Nineveh, serving as an attraction that is today considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (Christou, 2022).

Figure 2.5

Ancient Paradise Garden



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "A lush, ancient paradise garden, inspired by the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, with terraced levels, flowing water, exotic plants, and classical architecture, evoking a sense of ancient luxury and beauty" (2025, August 20).

Like Egypt, only the privileged classes could afford these journeys, with merchants and ambassadors being the main travelers (Maribel, n.d.). However, travel was difficult as pavement was almost absent, and dusty roads and scarce bridges meant that travelers had to use ferries to cross waterways, often having to dismantle their vehicles to do so (Mark, 2022). Another difficulty was the presence of bandit gangs, which led travelers to hire armed guards. Despite these dangers, the trade stimulated significant advancements, including the invention of the wheel for vehicles and the development of long-distance communication through cuneiform

writing (Mark, 2022). Tourism infrastructure, such as inns or guides, was almost non-existent, so travelers relied on the hospitality of locals and organized their trips into caravans to ensure safety (Maribel, n.d.).

While travel in Mesopotamia centered on commerce and religion, the Greeks took it to a new level by linking it to philosophy, education, and sports.

2.2.1.3 Greeks

The Greek concept of *Theoria*, which referred to journeys for pilgrimage to sacred sites, such as the Oracle at Delphi, with the hope of returning with a deeper insight, marked a significant evolution in the motivations for travel (D'Angour, 2023). Travels were no longer just for survival or trade but also became a tool for personal enrichment and intellectual exploration. Thinkers like the politician Solon and the historian Herodotus traveled extensively "for the love of learning and to see the world," demonstrating that the pursuit of wisdom was a key driver of mobility (D'Angour, 2023). In addition to this, the great sanctuaries (especially Olympia) were important centers that attracted visitors for three main reasons: a religious motive, as they were important centers for pilgrimage; a sports motive, as they were the major centers for sports and competitions; and a cultural motive, as visitors sought to admire the architectural and artistic treasures of the sanctuaries (García Romero, 2013).

Figure 2.6

Orestes Consulting the Oracle at Delphi: Red-Figure Bell-Krater (4th century BCE)



Note. Reprinted from Hayward (2021). The original krater is housed at the British Museum.

Figure 2.7

The Ruins of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi



Note. Reprinted from Hayward (2021).

The ancient Olympic Games were a major athletic event of antiquity, held every four years in the summer to honor Zeus with sacrifices and contests (Anastasiou, 2025). It took place in Olympia, a valley near Elis, a Greek city (El-Harami, 2015). Olympia was a sacred space without a permanent population or political structure (Anastasiou, 2025). In this sanctuary, there were buildings for worship and votive offerings. Facilities for the staging of the Games, along with artworks, were in the surrounding area (Anastasiou, 2025). The attendance of poets, writers, orators, and philosophers was another attraction, as the Games offered the best opportunity to expose their ideas and literary compositions, a key means of diffusion in a culture that was still primarily oral at the time (NPR Staff, 2012).

Figure 2.8

The Ancient Olympic Games at the Sanctuary of Zeus



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "The Ancient Olympic Games at the sanctuary in Olympia, Greece, showing one large Temple of Zeus, athletic contests, and philosophers and crowds, in an ancient style" (2025, August 20).

Figure 2.9

Ruins of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia



Note. Reprinted from AgeFotostock (2024), as published in *Historia National Geographic*

Beyond the main sporting and cultural events, the atmosphere in the surroundings of the sanctuary was a vibrant, commercial hub. The diverse activities in the area around the Games ensured that even the vast crowds of spectators never felt bored (García Romero, 2013). Hawkers of food, drinks, and merchandise, along with jugglers, acrobats, dancers, artisans, singers, and fortune-tellers, came to the great sanctuaries to profit from the large attendance (El-Harami, 2015). It created an experience that went far beyond the religious and intellectual pursuits of the main events.

Despite the cultural and social attractions, travel in ancient Greece was hard. The road network was rudimentary, and much of the travel was by sea, making it highly dependent on the weather (García Romero, 2013). The trip from Athens to Olympia, for example, took five or six days by road (Kokkinidis, 2025). The journey was also affected by the availability of boats and

the constant threat of pirates and brigands (García Romero, 2013). To provide some protection, the famous “Olympic truce”⁵ allowed athletes, artists, and their families, along with pilgrims, to travel in complete safety to attend or participate in the Games and then return to their respective countries (International Olympic Committee, n.d.). However, once they arrived, tourists visiting Olympia for the Games did not escape the inconveniences of large crowds, which often made it impossible to find transport to leave the place at the same time. In addition, facilities to accommodate travelers were limited, forcing visitors to sleep in tents and to rough it, with limited access to food or bathing facilities (García Romero, 2013).

Building on the foundations of travel for leisure and culture laid by the Greeks, the Roman Empire revolutionized the concept of travel through the development of an impressive infrastructure.

2.2.1.4 Romans

With an extensive network of roads spanning over 80,000 kilometers, land travel became much faster and safer, giving rise to a new travel culture. While the primary purpose of travel continued to be utilitarian, the upper class began taking trips for cultural and leisure purposes (D'angour, 2023). Captivated by Greek culture, the Roman elite traveled to Greece to absorb its intellectual traditions and admire its artistic treasures. This newfound leisure also led to the emergence of the first vacation destinations, such as the villas in Pompeii, and to explorations of iconic cities like Rome, Alexandria, and Ephesus, known for their architectural richness (Meddings, 2023).

⁵ The "Olympic Truce" (or Ekecheiria) was a sacred agreement among Greek city-states that established a period of absolute peace during the Ancient Olympic Games. Its primary goal was to ensure safe passage for athletes, pilgrims, and artists traveling to Olympia, protecting them from regional conflicts and banditry.

Figure 2.10

Elevated view of the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii



Note. Reprinted from *Suburban Villas in Ancient Pompeii*, by Madain Project.

Figure 2.11

The interior of the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii



Note. Reprinted from *Suburban Villas in Ancient Pompeii*, by Madain Project.

Figure 2.12

Frontal exterior view of the Villa of Diomedes



Note. Reprinted from Suburban Villas in Ancient Pompeii, by Madain Project

Figure 2.13

Lateral exterior view of the Villa of Diomedes



Note. Reprinted from Suburban Villas in Ancient Pompeii, by Madain Project.

According to Bofill Monés (2017), the Roman Empire built an extensive and enduring network of roads that spanned a vast area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea. This impressive system, which reached a length of 400,000 kilometers by the third century AD, was a key factor in the empire's rise, as it provided unparalleled speed and mobility for military forces and served as the primary route for commerce. The most important of these, known as *Viae Publicae*, were robust constructions up to 12 meters wide. These state-built roads were managed by a government official, the *curator viarum*, who oversaw their construction and maintenance. Despite their durability, Roman roads were dangerous, as travelers who were not well-equipped or part of a large caravan were vulnerable to bandits. For this reason, the travelers avoided traveling at night.

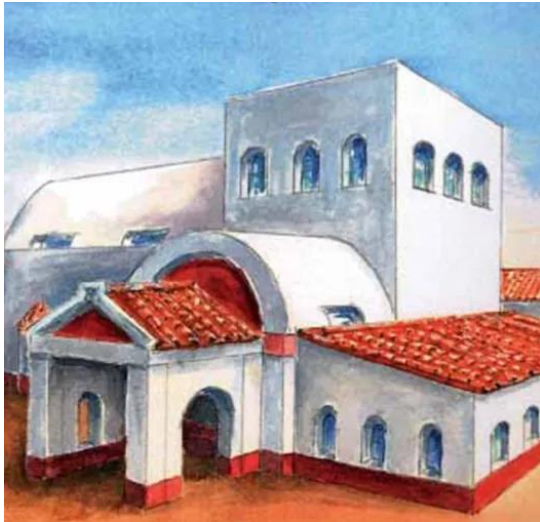
In the 2nd century AD, the Roman Empire's road network was a vast system spanning roughly 400,000 kilometers, connecting distant territories from as far as Scotland and Romania to Mesopotamia and the Sahara Desert. Rome itself served as the hub of this network, with some 30 major roads leading to the capital. Many were named either for their builders (e.g., the Via Appia) or for the places they led to (e.g., the Via Ardeatina) (Rodríguez Morales, 2024). These roads were crucial to the civilization, as they not only facilitated the expansion of the Empire but also ensured the distribution of essential goods and services throughout its network of cities (Rodríguez Morales, 2024). This efficiency enabled travel at high speeds, as travelers could change horses at regular intervals of 15 to 20 kilometers (Rodríguez Morales, 2024). The extensive Roman roads served as arteries of the Empire, with travelers from all directions flocking to the city of Tiber for various purposes, including trade, military service, provincial politicians seeking career advancement, and poets hoping to find a wider audience for their work (Rodríguez Morales, 2024).

To facilitate the rest of the travelers, a series of accommodations of varying quality was built along the roads, offering travelers a place to rest and find food. Roadside establishments, built to serve the Roman roads, were typically equipped with thermal and public baths for travelers to wash off the dust and rest (Rodríguez Morales, 2024). The most common Latin names for these places were *mansiones* and *mutationes*. *Mansiones* served as inns, whose architectural structure included all the typical areas of an inn: a reception space, guest rooms, a dining hall, and a kitchen equipped with an oven and forge, as well as thermal baths, granaries, and stables (Hermida, 2021). Meanwhile, *mutationes* were stations or stops that provided a service for vehicles and, most importantly, for the animals used for transport. At these sites, travelers could exchange their horses for fresh ones to continue their journey (Hermida, 2021).

Not all travelers frequented the same type of lodging. Travelers with more economic resources often sought out more refined options, and the most frequented guesthouses became the first *tabernae*, which were more like a hostel than the modern concept of a tavern (Hermida, 2021). Conversely, *cauponae* were typically located near *mansiones* and served as establishments for travelers with limited resources (Hermida, 2021).

Figure 2.14

Mansio: Roman Accommodation for Travelers with Higher Resources



Note. Reprinted from Hermida (2021). The original illustration was published in El Nuevo Miliario (2008).

Figure 2.15

Mutatio: Roman Station for Changing Horses and Supplies



Note. Reprinted from Historia y otros Monstruos (2019).

Figure 2.16

Tabernae: Roman Shops and Gathering Places Serving Food and Wine; Vestiges in Pompeii



Note. Reprinted from AbUrbeCondita (2021).

Figure 2.17

Cauponae: Roman Inns for Low-Resource Travelers



Note. Reprinted from Rojas Harb (2021).

The development of this complex network of services, the relative peace of the Roman Empire, known as the *Pax Romana*, not only facilitated business travel but also enabled the Roman elite to travel for pleasure. These "vacations" became a symbol of status and culture, with motivations very similar to those of modern tourism. Thanks to an exceptional communication network and infrastructure, the Romans had the best roads and means of transport of their time. As a result, thousands of citizens took advantage of the warm summer to travel in search of coastal resorts, highlighting popular destinations such as Baiae, Aedepus, and Canopus, among others (Korstanje, 2009).

Figure 2.18

Ancient Baiae: Rome's Coastal Party Capital



Note. Illustration by Jean Claude Golvin. Reprinted from Meddings (2017).

Leisure Travel of the Roman Elite. The Roman nobility made a clear distinction between *negotium*, which represented their daily occupations, and *otium*, their time for rest. For the philosopher Seneca, leaving the city itself was a valuable experience that allowed for encounters with different peoples and cultures, as well as the contemplation of natural spectacles previously unknown. He highlighted the fascination that rivers inspired, citing the Tigris, the Nile, and the Meander (in modern-day Turkey) as examples of tourist destinations where natural and artistic heritage served as the main draw (García Sánchez, 2024).

However, this tourism was not exclusive to periods of rest; citizens often integrated leisure into their obligations, and it was not uncommon for officials and diplomats to engage in tourism while on military or diplomatic missions outside of Rome. To enjoy a wonderful vacation, it was not necessary to travel to the other side of the Mediterranean. Since the Republican era, many Roman patricians owned vacation villas on the coast or in the countryside to escape their obligations and fully dedicate themselves to *otium*. The region of Campania, with towns like Pompeii and Herculaneum, was a highly sought-after location for these second homes due to its proximity to Rome, its mild climate, and its inviting beaches. In these retreats, time passed peacefully with leisure activities such as meditation, reading, massages, boat rides, fishing, and hunting, as described by authors like Cicero and Pliny the Younger (García Sánchez, 2024).

Figure 2.19

Archaeological Remains of a Roman Villa: Evidence of Travel and Wealth



Note. Photograph reprinted from García Sánchez (2024). Image rights managed by Henryk Sadura / AGE Fotostock.

Figure 2.20

The Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum (Reconstruction)



Note. Reprinted from u/AnotherMansCause (2022) on Reddit. Original illustration by Rocío Espín Piñar.

The main incentive for the Roman elite's travels was their curiosity and admiration for archaeological sites. Although the routes to destinations like Alexandria and Canopus had numerous luxury inns, the main attraction for these wealthy citizens was the exotic and distant centers of Egypt and Greece. Places such as Alexandria, Ephesus, Smyrna, Thebes, Memphis, and Rhodes became mandatory stops for a group of privileged travelers (Korstanje, 2009). The Romans developed a deep fascination with Egypt, a land that completely amazed them. The uniqueness of its religious rites and the strangeness of its hieroglyphic script both disconcerted and, at the same time, captivated its visitors (García Sánchez, 2024).

Figure 2.21

Alexandria at the End of the 18th Century



Note. The image is in the public domain. Reprinted from Gil Paneque (2020).

Figure 2.22

Ruins of the Ancient City of Ephesus



Note. Reprinted from Ephesus Travel Guide (2021).

Figure 2.23

The Great Sphinx and Giza Pyramids (1839 Lithograph)



Note. Lithograph by an unknown author (1839). Reprinted from Ferreiro (2025).

Figure 2.24

Egyptian Hieroglyphs on the Sarcophagus of Ankhnesneferibre (26th Dynasty)



Note. Illustration attributed to Guillaume Blanchard (2015). Original artifact housed at the British Museum. Licensed under GNU Free Documentation License. Reprinted from Scoville (2015).

The most cultured travelers, especially bibliophiles, had a valuable planning tool: the periegeses. These volumes were not simple travel guides, but rather descriptive narratives that served as art-historical treatises on the most famous monuments of antiquity (García Sánchez, 2024). The most famous and detailed surviving example is Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, written in the 2nd century CE. Pausanias, the Greek geographer (110–180 AD), is considered the world's first travel writer. He took advantage of the Roman Empire's unification to travel without borders from his native Asia Minor to Egypt, Jerusalem, and Italy. He is famous for describing the ruins of Mycenae and Troy. His major work, *'Hellados Periegesis'*, which translates to 'Description of Greece' or 'Tour of Greece', is a detailed guide to mainland Greece that also serves as a valuable historical and cultural document (Maltezou & Pavli, 2022). Greece was one

of the most highly regarded destinations for Roman tourists, who followed in the footsteps of Homer and the great philosophers. As the poet Horace noted, "captured Greece captivated its fierce conqueror". This cultural dominance consequently introduced art to the Latin world (D'Angour, 2023).

Figure 2.25

Pausanias' Description of Greece Manuscript (1485)



Note. Original manuscript by the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Italy. Reprinted from Wasson (2017). This image is in the public domain.

Figure 2.26

Map of Locations Described in Pausanias' Description of Greece



Note. Original map by J. G. Frazer (n.d.). Reprinted from Wasson (2017). This image is in the public domain.

The Bay of Naples was the Romans' favorite vacation destination, although every social class enjoyed it in distinct ways. Poets like Horace raved about the beauty of bays like Baiae, and the elite built luxurious villas on the coast and in the mountains. At night, the nobility enjoyed sumptuous dinners with oysters as their excursion boats plied the sea. However, this was not a paradise exclusive to the rich. Less affluent Romans were also drawn to the Bay, traveling to towns such as Tibur, Antium, and Baiae itself. Everyone enjoyed the beaches and thermal baths, although the wealthy could swim in private pools built amidst the waves (Cords, 2023).

Figure 2.27

A Roman Holiday: Depiction of Coastal Leisure and Travel, Likely Based in the Bay of Naples



Note. Painting reprinted from García Sánchez (2024). Image rights managed by Bridgeman / ACI.

Social Mobility and Public Entertainment in the Roman Empire. Beyond the long journeys to distant provinces, a substantial part of Roman leisure life took place within the borders of the empire, often very close to the cities themselves. Roman citizens did not only move to escape urban life, but also to participate in the vibrant public life that Rome offered.

Those prepared for a long journey could travel with relative safety throughout the vast Roman Empire. The roads were well-maintained, and communication was easier because people spoke Latin almost everywhere. Travelers moved on foot, by carriage, in a sedan chair, or on horseback. In a single day, a person in good physical condition could cover about 30 km on foot, while a carriage could reach up to 80 km and a slightly greater distance on horseback (Cords, 2023).

Despite the Roman Empire's constant expansion through wars and conquests, Romans found time for entertainment and leisure. It was largely possible because slaves worked all year round and were forbidden from attending public events, thereby allowing citizens more leisure time. Entertainment and leisure were so vital that, during his reign, Emperor Claudius designated 159 public holidays per year, with 93 of them funded by the state (El-Harami, 2015). The thermal baths, amphitheaters, and circuses became the epicenter of entertainment and social travel, attracting people from all social classes.

Theater was one of the principal forms of entertainment, developed under a strong influence from Greek culture. Plays took place in Rome and other cities in large-scale theaters. Emperor Pompey, for example, built a theater in 55 BC that could hold 27,000 spectators. Admission to these plays, in which all actors were male slaves, was free for citizens (El-Harami, 2015).

Figure 2.28

Roman Leisure Zone: Commercial Stands and Food Outlets Near the Amphitheater in Carnuntum



Note. Illustration reprinted from HispanTV (2017).

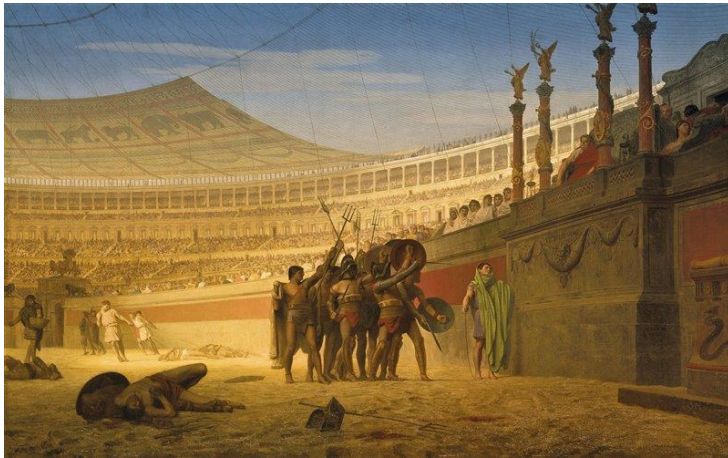
Amphitheaters and Gladiatorial Spectacles. Roman amphitheaters, with their oval or elliptical shape, were one of the superb architectural innovations. Their design, a vaulted masonry structure supporting the seating, allowed them to hold many spectators (Historic England, 2018). The first permanent amphitheater in Rome (29 B.C.) had a capacity of 50,000 people. The floor of the arena, a Latin word meaning sand, was covered to absorb blood. Underneath, a network of corridors and service chambers kept animals and gladiators hidden until it was time for them to enter the combat (El-Harami, 2015).

The main attraction of these venues was the gladiator fights. Gladiators were typically criminals, slaves, prisoners of war, or, on occasion, volunteers who fought for a fee. Over time, matches against wild animals were introduced, where men on foot or horseback would face exotic animals. The fate of a defeated gladiator depended on the crowd, who decided whether he would live or die (Ruth, 2022).

Admission to the shows was generally free to the public. Emperors and magistrates employed games and spectacles to pacify the populace, secure their favor, and consolidate their political power, a practice that spread to the provinces. In many small towns, the amphitheater was the only form of entertainment available (El-Harami, 2015).

Figure 2.29

Roman Amphitheaters and Gladiators: Venue and Participants



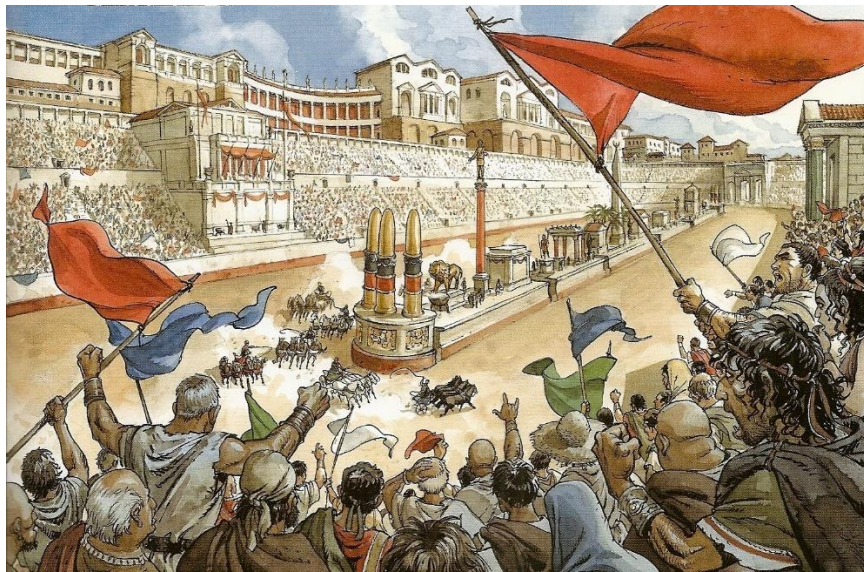
Note. Illustration reprinted from Castillo (2023).

The Roman Circus: The Most Popular Sport. Roman citizens always found time for leisure and entertainment. The most popular and expensive sport in the Empire was chariot racing, a spectacle that appealed to all social classes, from slaves to the emperor himself (McCormack, 2023).

Romans attended the *Circus Maximus*, a massive oval stadium in the center of Rome with a capacity for 200,000 spectators, to watch their favorite teams, identified by their charioteers' colors: red, white, blue, and green (McCormack, 2023). Events began with an elaborate procession that included sponsors, racers, musicians, and dancers. Initially, 12 races were held per day, a number that was later doubled (El-Harami, 2015).

Figure 2.30

The Roman Circus: Venue for Leisure and Entertainment



Note. Reprinted from Sevilla-Zamora (2014). Original illustration source:

trazosnelbloc.blogspot.com.es.

Although the *Circus Maximus* provided the adrenaline and fervor of a public spectacle, Roman leisure also manifested itself in a more tranquil way. To escape the hustle and bustle of the city and the crowds at sporting events, citizens flocked to the baths, which served as the epicenter of social life and relaxation.

Roman Baths: Centers of Social Life. Although the Romans adopted the custom of bathing from the Greeks, they took it to a new level with the construction of enormous bath complexes. Bathing became one of the most common daily activities, serving as a fundamental social and leisure center for urban communities. The baths served as a gathering place where all social strata converged, from emperors and senators to plebeians and slaves. People went not only to bathe but also to socialize, exercise, eat, play games, and read (Hays, 2024a).

Figure 2.31

Luxury and Social Leisure at the Baths of Caracalla



Note. Painting, *Los baños en las termas de Caracalla*, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1899.

Licensed as Public Domain. Reprinted from Gómez Espelosín (2023).

The popularity of the baths grew due to a series of factors, including communal life in cities, the lack of private baths in humble homes, and the fact that admission was affordable. Although men and women bathed in separate areas, the baths worked as a kind of social equalizer (El-Harami, 2015).

The construction of these complexes was a feat of engineering. A typical visit followed a sequence of rooms with progressively higher temperatures: the *apodyterium* (changing room),

the *frigidarium* (cold room with a pool), the *tepidarium* (warm room), and the *caldarium* (hot room). Hot water was distributed through the hypocaustum system, a method of underfloor heating, which in turn was fed by an extensive network of aqueducts (Mowdy, n.d).

Additionally, larger complexes included gymnasiums and exercise areas (*palaestra*) (El-Harami, 2015).

Figure 2.32

An Apodyterium: The Changing Room in a Roman Bath



Note. Painting, *An Apodyterium*, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1886. Image rights managed by Bridgeman Images. Reprinted from MeisterDrucke (n.d.).

Figure 2.33

Frigidarium: Ruins of the Cold Bath in Ostia Antica



Note. Photograph of the ruins, reprinted from Gómez Espelosín (2023). Image rights managed by iStock.

While the Roman elite often had their own luxurious private baths, they also patronized public baths, as bathing was considered an integral part of daily life. Several types of facilities existed: the *balnea meritoria*, which were smaller private baths built and operated for profit; and the *thermae*, much larger and more lavish public complexes, often gifted to the people by emperors or wealthy citizens. Although the terminology could be flexible, the difference was like that between a country club and a public pool today. While the *thermae* featured marble and elaborate details, the *balnea* were simple. Regarding the enslaved, they used bathing facilities in the homes where they worked or had designated areas within the public baths (Kjw2, 2004).

Figure 2.34

The Roman Baths in Bath, England: Best Preserved Thermae in Europe



Note. Photograph reprinted from Llano (2024).

In conclusion, for both the Greeks and the Romans, the act of travel transcended mere functionality and became an intentional pursuit of pleasure and personal development. The Greeks, motivated by the pursuit of knowledge, the appreciation of culture, and participation in sporting events like the Olympic Games, laid the groundwork for individual enrichment through travel. The Romans, driven by a pervasive culture of leisure and entertainment, fostered mass leisure and tourism, attending spectacles like chariot races and gladiatorial combats, and transforming the baths into centers of social life and relaxation. In essence, both people established a precedent where experiential movement was deemed as vital as travel for necessity, thus setting the foundation for the tourism we know today.

The collapse of the Roman Empire and the subsequent turbulence of the Middle Ages halted the development of leisure and infrastructural travel. However, by the Renaissance, the concept of long-distance, organized travel for educational and cultural refinement was slowly revived, culminating in the distinct phenomenon known as The Grand Tour.

2.2.2 The Grand Tour

Richard Lassels⁶ coined the term Grand Tour in 1670. It refers to the extensive journeys undertaken by young aristocrats from Britain and other parts of Europe between the 16th and the 19th centuries (Koger, 2022). Their voyage through Europe generally lasted three years. To carry out and program this extensive journey, one of the most indispensable instruments was the map, usually included in the guidebooks (Emiliani, 2019). The Grand Tour was an educational journey focused on personal development. The Grand Tour also served as an anthropological experience, allowing travelers to learn about and encounter other cultures and ways of life (López Martínez, 2015). It was considered a fundamental rite of passage for young people of the upper class, as it was a mandatory requirement to complete their cultural and social education before entering adult life (G.M., 2022).

This trip was not a simple pastime, but a social rite of passage intended to complement their education with a direct encounter with antiquity and the cultures of the continent. Although the educational purpose was paramount, the motivations were quite varied, including the pursuit of physical and mental health, the development of artistic interests, and, in some cases, even the exploration of one's own identity (Montoro García, 2018).

The Grand Tour was an educational and social journey, typically undertaken by young aristocrats between the ages of 18 and 25. After crossing the English Channel, many would purchase a carriage to continue their journey. During the trip, a tutor, known as a "bear-leader," accompanied them. The tutor instructed them in art, music, literature, and history, and

⁶ Richard Lassels was an English Catholic priest, tutor, and travel writer. As a mentor to young aristocrats, he promoted travel across Europe—specifically to Italy—as a means of cultural, artistic, and architectural education for the elite. He argued that young aristocrats should travel to France and Italy to understand the world's political and cultural realities.

often had a retinue of servants. While there was no fixed route, the tour typically included the great cities of Europe, with a prolonged stay in Italy, with Rome being the most sought-after destination. The main objective was cultural development and learning, so the young men studied art, admired monuments, and socialized with the European elite (Ross & Phillips, 2020).

The Grand Tour was as much about social prestige as it was about education, making it essential to acquire souvenirs that served as crucial proof of the authenticity of the experience. Travelers were advised to show off their wealth and quickly became avid shoppers, collecting items to display upon their return (Ross & Phillips, 2020).

These souvenirs ranged from personal portraits and authentic pieces of ancient art to marble statues from Rome and colorful glassware from Venice (G.M., 2022; Ross & Phillips, 2020). In this context, the work of two artists perfectly reflects the equivalent of today's photos and postcards. Giovanni Paolo Panini focused on the wealthiest clients, painting custom canvases to commemorate their trips; this was the equivalent of an exclusive, expensive photograph of their own experience. On the other hand, Giovanni Battista Piranesi sought a broader market by creating engravings of Roman ruins for mass production. These prints served as postcards for wealthy travelers who lacked the time or inclination to commission a personalized painting (Vaver, 2023). The *vedute*⁷ served as a visual enticement before the journey and functioned as a powerful memory upon returning home, even inspiring others to embark on their own adventure (Tice et al., 2008). This demand fueled an entire industry, with specialized artists like the *vedutisti*⁸ Canaletto and Piranesi becoming wealthy by selling their art to these affluent tourists

⁷ Vedute (Italian for "views") refers to a genre of highly detailed, large-scale paintings or prints of a cityscape. These were the 18th-century precursors to modern travel photography and postcards.

⁸ Vedutisti (singular: vedutista) were painters of cityscapes or "views" known as vedute. These artists specialized in highly detailed and perspective-accurate representations of urban landmarks, which were highly sought after by travelers as prestigious souvenirs.

(Delpiano, n.d.; Thompson, 2003). A prosperous market for spurious antiques and forgeries also emerged to capitalize on the high demand ("Reynolds on the grand tour," 2015). Upon returning home, travelers proudly displayed their collections in family estates, using them to validate their experience and high social status (Ross & Phillips, 2020).

With the arrival of the 18th century and the Enlightenment, the Grand Tour reached its "Golden Age." This movement's emphasis on knowledge and politics led to the trips becoming more standardized and formalized, with future leaders seeking to learn about governments. The popularity of geography in Great Britain also boosted the success of travel guides and publications. This standardization led to the trivialization of the Tour: itineraries, time, and destinations became predictable. More affordable alternatives emerged, such as the Petit Tour, along with the first historical "tour package," which had a fixed route through Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam (Montoro García, 2018).

The Grand Tour was no longer a journey exclusive to the aristocracy due to the rise of a new middle class. The foundation of the nobility's power, land ownership, began to decline, while the bourgeoisie's power, based on commercial ventures, grew. This redistribution of wealth allowed the Grand Tour to expand to other social classes. As a result, having completed the trip became a new source of status and respect, separating prestige from family lineage. The democratization of travel also spurred the creation of more travel literature, which helped make the practice more common (López Martínez, 2015).

A consequence of this social phenomenon was the creation of travel literature and novels whose plots unfolded during these expeditions. Future travelers bought these books before setting off and contributed to their creation upon their return. Additionally, many travelers, driven by the need to capture their adventures abroad, wrote their memoirs, helping future

historians better understand the reality of the time and how the natives of different countries viewed each other (Montoro García, 2018).

Starting in 1815, the Grand Tour, as it was known, began to disappear. The main reason was the political instability caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which swept across Europe from 1789 until 1815. Once peace returned, tourism to Europe gradually became accessible to much wider social classes. So, instead of being an exclusive privilege of the aristocracy, the trip became an accessible activity for the middle class, although it was still a lengthy and costly process. Despite its end, the legacy of the Grand Tour remains to this day. The journey shaped the notion that venturing abroad is an enriching experience that offers culture, sophistication, and the opportunity for personal growth. Many of the first travelers wrote about their adventures, which fueled society's curiosity and a new level of wanderlust. In essence, the Grand Tour was the first step toward mass tourism and the kind of travel we know today, influencing the destinations we visit and the expectations we have when we leave home to explore the world (Ross & Phillips, 2020).

While the Grand Tour established the cultural value of international travel, the activity remained financially inaccessible to most of the population. The authentic shift from elite leisure to a mass global phenomenon required two fundamental changes: industrialization (which provided speed and disposable income) and the professionalization of travel services. These factors, beginning in the mid-19th century, democratized the experience and created the environment necessary for the rise of Mass Tourism.

2.2.3 Mass tourism

While the Grand Tour established the ideal of travel as a rite of passage for the elite, the dawn of a new era brought with it technological innovations and entrepreneurial efforts that transformed travel into an accessible leisure activity for the masses.

As the Grand Tour's aristocratic exclusivity began to wane, a new type of travel emerged that was not only more accessible but fundamentally different in its purpose and structure. Mass tourism refers to planned and organized trips for large groups of people who share a similar purpose, such as recreation or sightseeing. Unlike individual tourism, this type of travel is managed by industry professionals who handle the logistics, allowing many people to travel simultaneously to the same destination (Sezgin & Yolal, 2012). This new model, fueled by both technological advancements and entrepreneurial efforts, transformed the journey from a personal and educational rite of passage into a standardized and recreational experience for the public.

The continent of Europe, and notably England, played a key role in the development of industrial tourism. It was there that mass tourism officially began in the second half of the nineteenth century. The emergence of this phenomenon is due to two main factors: significant advancements in transportation technology and the individual efforts of the English entrepreneur Thomas Cook (Sezgin & Yolal, 2012).

The Role of Technology in Mass Tourism

Groundbreaking advancements in transportation technology directly enabled the rise of mass tourism in the 19th century. The steam engine, applied to both trains and ships, shattered the previous limitations of travel—it made journeys faster, safer, and far more predictable. Railways expanded at an unprecedented rate, creating vast networks that connected cities and

towns, making it possible to move large groups of people efficiently and at a low cost. This new infrastructure was reliable and not subject to the weather-related delays that plagued travel by horse or sailing ship (Cascetta & Henke, 2023).

At the same time, the development of steamships revolutionized global travel. These new vessels were no longer dependent on wind patterns, drastically cutting down the time it took to cross oceans. A transatlantic trip that once took months by sailing ship could now be completed in a matter of weeks (Pascali, 2019). The combination of railways on land and steamships at sea created a truly integrated transportation system that not only facilitated trade but also opened the world for a new era of leisure travel for the masses.

The role of Thomas Cook

The new infrastructure created by these technologies needed a visionary to unlock its full potential for leisure. Thomas Cook was that innovator. He did not invent the train, but he was the first to use it to create a modern travel product.

Born in Melbourne, Derbyshire, on November 22, 1808, Thomas Cook was a pioneering English entrepreneur. He became famous for founding one of the first and most successful travel companies in history. Initially a Baptist missionary and a member of the temperance movement, Cook's interest in travel emerged when he organized a train trip for the Leicester Temperance Society in 1841.

This event is considered the milestone that marked the birth of organized tourism. His innovative approach, which included organizing affordable excursions, allowed many to experience train travel for the first time, transforming the concept of travel from a privilege of the elite into an activity accessible to the public (Zukauskas, 2022). His key contribution was the "package tour", a pre-arranged trip that included everything from transportation and

accommodation to meals in one single price. It eliminated the logistical hassle and financial uncertainty that once defined travel. By standardizing the journey and negotiating with hotels and railway companies on a large scale, Cook could offer trips at a fraction of the cost, making travel accessible to the middle and working classes for the first time.

In essence, he transformed the act of travel from a personal, aristocratic endeavor into a predictable, affordable, and organized commodity (Cripps, 2019; Prescott & Gillett, 2019).

The Catalysts of Mass Tourism

The rise of mass tourism in the second half of the nineteenth century was not a spontaneous event; instead, it was the result of a convergence of social, economic, and technological factors that created the necessary conditions for its emergence. Key constitutional factors, such as the Industrial Revolution and the rise of paid holidays, created a new class of people with both the time and the money to travel (Sezgin & Yolal, 2012).

However, it was the developmental factors in technology that ultimately acted as a catalyst for this new industry. Groundbreaking advancements in transportation, particularly in aviation and sea travel, dramatically reduced the time and cost of travel, making distant destinations accessible to a broader public. For instance, the basic effect of technology on aircraft was directly related to the Second World War, which created a large body of experienced pilots, led to the construction of airfields worldwide, and increased public familiarity with aviation. The subsequent development of jumbo jets in the late 1960s made it possible to transport many passengers over long distances at a lower price (Sezgin & Yolal, 2012).

Similarly, the introduction of financial technologies, such as credit cards and travel cheques, in the mid-20th century provided tourists with a sense of financial security, further

encouraging them to travel far from home. These technological innovations collectively laid the physical and economic groundwork for the modern, accessible era of mass tourism (Sezgin & Yolal, 2012). As the driving force behind the tourism sector for decades, mass tourism has democratized travel, allowing millions of people to access experiences that were considered an exclusive luxury (ILUNION Hotels, 2025b).

The Impact of Mass Tourism

The model of tourism popularized by figures like Thomas Cook not only democratized travel but also unleashed a series of complex and far-reaching consequences. To understand the need for a new approach, it's crucial to examine both the benefits and the challenges that this phenomenon has generated on a global scale.

Positive Aspects

Mass tourism has established itself as a global economic engine, driving local economies and generating thousands of direct jobs in sectors such as hospitality and gastronomy, as well as indirect jobs in crafts and transport. In addition to creating a vital source of income for many developing nations, the sector has stimulated investments in infrastructure, resulting in the improvement of airports, roads, and public services that also benefit the local population. This boom in travel has also facilitated cultural exchange, allowing millions of people from diverse backgrounds to interact, thereby fostering greater understanding and helping to break down cultural barriers globally (Reali, 2024).

Negative Aspects

The high concentration of tourists in limited areas has a severe environmental and ecological impact, primarily through the overexploitation of natural resources, pollution from waste, and visible damage to sensitive ecosystems, including coral reefs and national parks.

Beyond the environmental toll, the sheer volume of visitors can overwhelm local communities, disrupt their daily lives and lead to the commercialization of culture, where authentic traditions become simple products for tourist consumption, losing their original meaning. This over-reliance on a single industry also makes local economies highly vulnerable to global crises, such as economic recessions or pandemics, which can halt the flow of visitors overnight (Tourism Notes, 2024).

The innovations of Thomas Cook not only made travel accessible but also gave birth to a massive industry with far-reaching consequences, both positive and negative. On the one hand, mass tourism has become a powerful engine for economic growth, creating jobs and stimulating development in destinations worldwide. The increased flow of people also fostered cultural exchange, allowing individuals to experience different societies firsthand. However, this accessibility came at a cost. The sheer volume of travelers led to environmental damage in fragile ecosystems and the commercialization of local cultures, turning authentic traditions into mere products for tourists. On the other hand, the model pioneered by Cook successfully transformed travel into a global phenomenon. Still, it also introduced a new set of challenges that continue to shape the modern tourism debate.

The growing awareness of these profound socio-cultural and environmental impacts led to the formal conceptualization and promotion of practices focused on minimizing harm and maximizing benefits, marking the critical shift toward Sustainable Tourism.

2.2.4 Sustainable Tourism

The challenges posed by the mass tourism model—specifically, environmental degradation and cultural commodification—necessitated a fundamental re-evaluation of how travel is planned and managed. This section will analyze the shift toward sustainable tourism,

exploring the theoretical motivations, core principles, and practical applications that define this essential paradigm change in the industry.

The surge of Mass Tourism in the latter half of the 20th century, primarily fueled by cheaper transportation and increased leisure time, successfully democratized travel, transforming it into an accessible right (Fernandez, 2023). However, this success simultaneously triggered a profound crisis: the mass model proved to be unsustainable. The industry's reliance on unchecked growth resulted in clear negative impacts, including the deterioration of fragile ecosystems, the overexploitation of natural resources (such as water and energy), and the erosion of cultural authenticity within host communities. These outcomes made it clear that tourism was destroying the very resources upon which it depended (Osteelea, 2022).

This global realization led to the emergence of Sustainable Tourism. Crucially, this is not merely a specialized product but an integrated management philosophy for tourism development (Mintur, 2025). The concept was formally established following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and was concretely applied to the industry with the adoption of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote in 1995 (United Nations, n.d.-a; Lanzarote, 2025). Its core purpose is vital: to meet current needs without compromising the opportunities of future generations.

The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as tourism that takes account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (United Nations, n.d.-b).

Sustainable tourism is a development model that rigorously assesses the environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism operations. This approach requires the implementation of corrective measures to mitigate any damage, while simultaneously integrating the needs of

both the visitors and the diverse stakeholders at the destination, including local communities, the industry, and the natural environment (Barten, 2024).

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged during the 1990s, primarily as the socioeconomic effects and environmental damage caused by uncontrolled mass tourism became impossible to ignore. Recognizing this mounting crisis, major international bodies and institutions, such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations, began issuing strong recommendations for tourism that respects and protects natural resources (BBVA, 2025).

The main reasons why sustainable tourism has gained significant traction stem directly from the negative consequences of this disorganized mass model. Issues like the outright destruction of the environment and severe labor seasonality in local communities are critical negative impacts that the sustainable approach can mitigate (BBVA, 2025).

Furthermore, several key factors have transformed sustainable tourism into a tangible reality: growing public awareness of environmental policies, the rise of conscious consumers who increasingly value corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts made by businesses, and the dedicated efforts of those regulating institutions (BBVA, 2025).

As a conceptual framework, Sustainable Tourism has the central goal of reducing the negative impact of tourism activities on the environment and local communities. Its primary objective is to achieve a positive Triple Bottom Line (TBL), mitigating adverse environmental, economic, and social consequences (Earth Changers, 2025). It achieves this by optimally managing resources, supporting biological conservation, and actively promoting the respect for and preservation of cultural heritage and local traditions (Barten, 2024).

The Three Fundamental Pillars

To achieve its objective, Sustainable Tourism rests on a triple balance of responsibilities, widely known as the Triple Bottom Line (Earth Changers, 2025):

- **Environmental Sustainability (Ecological):** Its principal focus is conservation. It involves applying rigorous measures to reduce the carbon footprint, optimize the use of scarce resources (such as water and energy), efficiently manage waste, and protect local biodiversity.
- **Socio-Cultural Sustainability:** This pillar centers on respect and justice. It ensures that travel respects the authenticity and traditional values of host communities. It seeks the active participation of the local population in decision-making and ensures the conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- **Economic Sustainability:** Its goal is viability and equity. It requires the sector to be profitable in the long term, but with the essential condition that benefits are shared fairly, generating stable employment and supporting small businesses within the local economy.

Practical Manifestations of Sustainability

Sustainable Tourism's philosophy is applied through various models, allowing its principles to function effectively. Among the most relevant types are Ecotourism, which focuses on environmental conservation; Community Tourism, which prioritizes local management and equity in wealth distribution; and Ethical Tourism, which demands conscious responsibility from the traveler (Unir, n.d.).

Specifically, Community Tourism marks a crucial turning point. By placing power and management in the hands of the host population, this model emphasizes the social dimension and

justice, paving the way for the next great challenge: ensuring that the right to travel not only benefits the community but is also accessible to every individual (Universidad Europea, 2025).

The Impact of Sustainable Tourism

With the three pillars of Sustainable Tourism defined, it's essential to understand how this philosophy translates into concrete results and what its contribution is to a more ethical vision of travel. The impact of sustainable tourism is measured not only by the reduction of harm but also by the active generation of benefits for the destination (Cámara Valencia, 2024).

- **Funding for Conservation:** Income generated by sustainable tourism activities becomes a direct source of funding for the protection of natural and cultural heritage. It ensures the survival of fragile parks, monuments, and ecosystems, guaranteeing that future generations, including all travelers, will have something to visit (Municipiods, 2023).
- **Improvement of Local Quality of Life:** By requiring the equitable distribution of economic benefits, the sustainable model contributes to the improvement of social infrastructure (such as schools and health centers) and public services within host communities. It enhances the quality of life for residents while simultaneously elevating the standard of the visitor experience (Garcia, 2023).
- **Promotion of Ethical Awareness:** Sustainable tourism acts as a vehicle for education and awareness. It promotes greater consciousness among both travelers and operators regarding the importance of cultural respect and environmental responsibility, thereby establishing the foundation for ethical and reflective behavior (Cortes, 2023).

The Critical Importance of Sustainability

The relevance of sustainable tourism is undeniable: although travel boosts local economies and generates employment, its side effects are often severe. Negative consequences include the overexploitation of resources, damage to fauna and flora, harm to cultural heritage, and a significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions (Suresh et al., 2025).

With continued growth in tourism activity projected, it is evident that the predominant travel model is unsustainable. This model risks depleting natural resources and endangering both the environment and the stability of communities. Therefore, sustainable tourism is established as an indispensable requirement to ensure the long-term viability and permanence of the industry (Milanović Pešić et al., 2025).

By adopting this philosophy, the responsibility rests with everyone, from governments and airlines to local businesses and individual travelers. Only by taking proactive measures aimed at benefiting communities and minimizing negative impact can tourism effectively transform into a positive force capable of generating global well-being (Anderson, 2024).

The success of Sustainable Tourism lies in demonstrating that the industry's viability requires social responsibility. This principle of justice and equity, inherent in the sociocultural pillar, compels us to recognize a persistent limitation in the traditional model: the lack of accessibility.

This very idea of using tourism as a force for good inevitably leads us to the next phase of travel's ethical evolution: inclusion. If sustainability focuses on justice for the planet and the community, the subsequent stage must focus on justice for the individual.

The logical next step is Inclusive Tourism (or Accessible Tourism). This approach ensures that the universal right to travel—a promise initiated by Mass Tourism—is converted into a practical reality for all people, regardless of their abilities.

2.2.5 Accessible and Inclusive Tourism

Sustainable Tourism laid the foundation by recognizing that the industry must operate with justice and social responsibility. However, this principle of justice demands an evolution: a shift from respect for the community to equity for the individual. Inclusive Tourism is the manifestation of this ethical imperative.

The tourism industry has grown into a vital economic pillar for many countries. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), approximately 1.3 billion people traveled internationally in 2023 (UNWTO, 2024). Given this volume, accessibility has gained priority attention (Campbell, 2025).

The tourism industry loses out on a fundamental segment of the traveling population whether people cannot access destinations because of accessibility challenges, the tourism industry loses out on a fundamental segment of the traveling population (Campbell, 2025). Recognizing this, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) established clear obligations for the tourism industry and public facilities (VVI, 2025). This Convention ensures that all people have the same freedom to participate in travel, leisure, and sports. This action effectively converted accessibility into a human right and an international legal requirement (Campbell, 2025).

The history of Inclusive Tourism, also known as Accessible Tourism, began to gain importance in the second half of the 20th century, running parallel to civil rights movements and equality policies. Its origins trace back to the years following World War II, when wounded and

disabled veterans started to demand better access to public facilities and services (ILUNION Hotels, 2025a).

The rise of the independent living movements in the United States and Europe was crucial. These individuals began demanding their right to participate in all spheres of life, including tourism (Fundación Juan XXIII, 2022). In the 1960s and 1970s, Accessible Tourism began to take institutional shape with the implementation of laws and regulations in various countries. In the U.S., the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 legally mandated that businesses and public services, including those in the tourism sector, provide adequate access for people with disabilities (ILUNION Hotels, 2025a).

In Europe, the 1995 Charter for Sustainable Tourism and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were key milestones in consolidating accessible tourism as an international priority. These regulations promoted equal access to tourism facilities, transportation services, and accommodation, underscoring the necessity of eliminating both physical and social barriers (OMT Madrid, 2014).

Inclusive Tourism is a development model rooted in the principle of Universal Accessibility. Its fundamental aim is to ensure that tourism products, environments, and services can be used and enjoyed by all people, regardless of their abilities, conditions, or age (Campbell, 2025).

Inclusive Tourism demands a cross-sectional, systemic offer of infrastructure, equipment, and services that allows everyone to enjoy travel, stays, and leisure without barriers or impediments. A destination that successfully guarantees these conditions is rightly termed an accessible destination (Rebelo et al., 2022). This holistic approach is essential because its goal goes beyond simply serving people with disabilities; it enhances the travel experience for a broad

segment of the population, including people with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, older adults, and people with temporary reduced mobility, and Families with young children or strollers (Zero Risk, n.d.).

Contrary to the idea of being a specialized subcategory, Inclusive Tourism aims to make all tourist destinations transversal. Its final purpose is not to create exclusive attractions, but to ensure that cultural, sports, leisure, and commercial venues are accessible to all visitors. By respecting differences and diversity, this model secures tangible benefits by ensuring equality, autonomy, safety, and comfort for all users. Furthermore, it gains a competitive advantage and strengthens the industry's long-term sustainability by embracing the potential of a broader, more diverse customer base (Rebelo et al., 2022). In fact, all people will require accessible environments, to a greater or lesser extent, at some point in their lives. Consequently, a considerable portion of tourism demand is currently being underserved due to a lack of understanding of its needs, making accessible development an economic and social imperative (OMT Madrid, 2014).

Principles of Inclusive Design in Tourism

Inclusive Tourism materialized through the application of Universal Design to the travel industry. It is not a building code, but rather a methodology that ensures environments, products, and services can be used by the highest number of people possible, without the need for specialized adaptations. Its key characteristics, according to Ortoprono (2022), include:

- **Equitable Use:** The design must not stigmatize or segregate any group; the tourism experience must be identical and dignified for all users.

- **Flexible Use:** The design must accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities, from wheelchair users to individuals having only one hand available to operate a device.
- **Perceptible Information:** Essential information must be Comprehensible and productive, communicated effectively, regardless of environmental conditions or the user's sensory abilities. It means utilizing multiple communication formats (visual, auditory, and tactile).
- **Low Physical Effort:** Spaces must allow for efficient and comfortable use with minimal effort.

The Communicational Equity Gap

Despite the progress made by Inclusive Tourism in eliminating physical barriers, a persistent limitation in the traditional and sustainable model has been the neglect of communicational accessibility. The historical focus on ramps, elevators, and restrooms has largely overlooked sensory barriers.

This deficiency is particularly critical for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. A tourist with a hearing disability systematically faces:

- **Loss of Cultural Content:** Tour guides often lack training in Sign Language, which prevents travelers from accessing the stories, historical context, and a deeper understanding of local heritage.
- **Social Isolation:** The inability to interact with guides, hotel staff, or the local population makes the experience a frustrating and solitary circumstance, limiting their autonomy and safety.

- **Superficial Travel:** The trip is limited to a visual experience where the traveler lacks access to the meaning and informational richness available to hearing persons.

Equity in tourism demands that access to information and knowledge be as universal as access to infrastructure.

The Ethical Gap in Accessible Tourism

Inclusive Tourism is not a trend, but the logical culmination of the historical evolution of travel. If Mass Tourism democratized travel by volume and sustainability made it ethical for the planet and the community, Inclusion makes it just and equitable for the individual.

The historical trajectory of tourism, from mass travel to sustainability, has culminated in an imperative for individual equity. We've established that Inclusive Tourism is not merely an option, but a human right (per the UN Convention) and an economic necessity.

Despite these advancements and the commitment to social justice, the current accessible tourism model exhibits a functional limitation. The focus has concentrated primarily on the elimination of physical barriers (ramps, elevators), neglecting sensory and communicational accessibility.

According to the principles of Universal Design, perceptible information is fundamental, as essential communication must be effective regardless of a user's sensory abilities. By failing to integrate Sign Language and other accessible communication formats, the tourism industry has traditionally failed to offer the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community access to meaning (the history, context, and cultural interaction) that is readily available to other travelers.

This deficiency in providing adequate information and guiding services represents the final gap that ethical tourism must close to fulfill its promise of equity. Recognizing this specific

systemic failure, the present study focuses on bridging this communications gap. Therefore, Echo Journeys will specialize in offering unique and meaningful cultural tours designed specifically for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, ensuring complete accessibility to the historical and cultural context of El Salvador.

2.3 History of Tourism in El Salvador

The origins of tourism in El Salvador and the evolution of its transportation infrastructure are deeply connected. Before the late 19th century, travel meant arduous journeys that precluded the concept of leisure. This section outlines how the introduction of modern transit systems, particularly electric streetcars and the national railway network, transformed travel from a necessary undertaking into an accessible and desirable experience, fundamentally laying the groundwork for a future tourism industry.

2.3.1 The Evolution of Travel and Transport in El Salvador

Before a tourism industry existed in El Salvador, travel differed significantly based on social class. Most of the population, composed of farm laborers and tenant farmers, primarily traveled on foot. In contrast, the wealthy, diplomats, and government officials used horses or oxcarts; in some cities, an incipient stagecoach service, the concept of traveling for leisure or pleasure was practically nonexistent, as the journey itself was an arduous and slow undertaking. Difficult roads meant that a trip between cities, towns, or to nearby countries could take days (García Castro & Cortez Ruiz, 2024).

In 1876, El Salvador began an era of modernization with the arrival of a horse and mule-drawn transport system. On July 27 of that year, it had its first official route. This service-connected San Salvador with surrounding areas, including Santa Tecla, Soyapango, and San

Jacinto, and passenger and freight transport traveled this route. Tickets, called abonos (passes), cost 10 colones, a considerably high price for the time (Historiadoresv, 2024).

However, this innovative system, which marked a milestone in urban transport, was replaced in 1894 by cableless electric streetcars (tranvías). The coverage of these new streetcars was extensive, and their cost was accessible, making them a popular and economical transport service. Despite their initial success, they ceased operating in 1929, chiefly due to the paving of streets in San Salvador (Melara Figueroa, 2022). This advance in urban mobility was a prelude to the development of local tourism, as it made travel between urban centers and recreation areas more accessible.

The railway system, whose development and decline span the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, emerged as one of the most ambitious national projects driven by a State motivated by the promise of great economic, political, and, indirectly, cultural benefits. Furthermore, it had the support of the merchants of the era, who viewed the train as a strategic means of transportation to further their interests in agricultural production and commerce (Flores-Guzmán, 2020). This modernization not only served agriculture but also laid the groundwork for leisure travel to become a real possibility for the population.

The railway system was inaugurated in El Salvador in 1882, coinciding with the country's growing need to transport its agricultural production. This project, managed by the International Railways of Central America (IRCA) company, facilitated the first major population movements toward San Salvador, marking a milestone in national mobility. Following the initial success, the railway network continued to expand. Between 1918 and 1921, they constructed the line between San Salvador and San Miguel. The following year, the segment from San Miguel to La Unión, reaching the Cutuco port, was inaugurated.

The service included cars with first and second-class seating. Beyond the tracks and schedules, the train journey was an experience. The trip from La Unión to San Salvador, for example, lasted ten hours, while the one from San Miguel took seven and a half. In Zacatecoluca, it was common for food vendors to board the cars to offer their products, and some passengers even brought their own food to enjoy during the ride (Calderón, 2024b).

In El Salvador, the railway played a distinct social role compared to neighboring countries. While in Honduras, trains were used exclusively by banana companies to transport their production, in El Salvador, the network also served passenger transport. Ironically, the country's small size was an advantage that allowed for greater national interconnection, a characteristic not seen in any other Central American country. The network's expansion even enabled international connectivity, as by 1929 it was possible to travel by train from La Unión to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala (Canal33tvelsalvador, 2015).

Taken together, the evolution of transport, from the early urban streetcars to the consolidation of the railway network, transformed the concept of travel, shifting it from an arduous task to an accessible experience, which laid the foundation for the incipient development of national tourism.

While the development of the railway system successfully laid the foundation for mass internal mobility, the nation's strategic ambition for economic integration and global prestige required a direct link to international markets. This necessity meant shifting investment focus away from terrestrial expansion to modernizing air transport. This decision marked the pivotal moment where the country prioritized the creation of a high-capacity, world-class international gateway.

2.3.2 Air Connectivity and Institutional Infrastructure

The Dawn of Flight and the First International Gateway. The nation's initial interest in aviation began early, with the arrival of the first official aircraft in 1912 and the formal establishment of the air sector in 1923 (AAC, n.d.). The foundational base for modern air transport was the Ilopango Airfield. Although the facility was constructed in 1940, it began formal operations on April 27, 1964, serving as the nation's primary air gateway until 1980 (Villeda, 2024). By 1930 (before its formal opening), the start of commercial aviation and international air mail service—facilitated by airlines like Pan American Airways—had already necessitated major infrastructure upgrades, establishing Ilopango as the first major international airport in Central America and setting a precedent for prioritizing air connectivity to boost the nation's commerce and prestige (AAC, n.d.).

By the 1970s, the increasing volume of passengers and the need to accommodate larger, modern jet aircraft meant the Ilopango facility had reached its operational limits (Erazo, 2025). Recognizing that inadequate infrastructure would hinder national economic growth, the government made a decisive strategic move: New Airport Mandate. In 1974, the Legislative Assembly approved the construction of the international airport, assigning the project to CEPA. Comalapa (La Paz) would be the location for its space and expansion potential (AAC, n.d.).

In 1980, El Salvador inaugurated the international airport: The new facility, later named after San Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, opened for international traffic in January 1980. This relocation officially provided El Salvador with a modern, high-capacity gateway, ensuring the country could effectively compete for global tourism and commerce, directly supporting the national economy (AAC, n.d.).

The airport's continued evolution demonstrates the government's recognition of air connectivity as a direct key economic driver for the nation. Institutional & Safety Upgrades: Regulatory bodies, like the autonomous Civil Aviation Authority (AAC), were established to ensure the sector's compliance with international safety standards, which is necessary for attracting reliable international carriers and tourists(AAC, n.d.).

Capacity for Tourism (2022): The major 2,855 m² commercial expansion in 2022—which increased annual passenger capacity to 5 million—is a direct investment aimed at capturing the rising demand for tourism (Erazo, 2025). This project, along with strategic plans for the new Aeropuerto Internacional del Pacífico, underscores the government's commitment to using air infrastructure to drive the tourism sector, generate revenue, and boost national commerce (AAC, n.d.). The Ilopango terminal remains active for limited operations, including military, private, and scenic tourism flights. And San Óscar Arnulfo Romero airport handles 100% commercial passenger traffic (Villeda, 2024).

The success in establishing air connectivity highlighted the immense economic potential of the tourism sector. The government realized that relying only on infrastructure was insufficient to manage this growth. Therefore, it was imperative to formalize the sector and create government institutions that regulate, promote, and systematically develop tourism, marking a new era of national commitment to organized tourism.

2.3.3 Institutionalization and the Tourism Framework

Following the modernization of the transportation network in the early 20th century, El Salvador began to transition from incidental travel to organized tourism. This shift required the creation of a formal institutional framework, which developed through several stages—from early advisory boards to specialized entities. This section details the evolution of the government

bodies and policies that formalized the industry, laying the foundation for the first large-scale tourism products, such as the Turicentros.

Founding and Evolution of Tourism Institutions

The development of tourism in El Salvador has its roots in the early decades of the 20th century. According to the ISTU (2024), on June 12, 1924, during the administration of Dr. Alfonso Quiñonez Molina, the government of El Salvador formally recognized the importance of tourism. They viewed it as a crucial way to not only bring in more foreign currency but also to introduce the international community to the country's rich cultural and historical heritage. This new vision led to the creation of the country's first Junta de Fomento al Turismo, marking a key milestone in the institutionalization of the industry.

In the 1940s, El Salvador set out to formally promote tourism. In 1947, the Legislative Assembly established the National Tourism Board (Junta Nacional de Turismo) as an entity with full autonomy and legal status. This initiative, promoted by the government and the private sector, sought not only to attract investment but also to raise awareness of the country's culture and history. The Board began its operations modestly in a room at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, after several moves, managed to establish itself in its own building in 1949. This period marked a key milestone with the appointment of poet Raúl Contreras as the Board's president in 1949. Thanks to his vision, significant tourism projects were executed, including the founding of the Turicentros system, known today as Recreational Parks. The objective of this system was clear: to provide Salvadoran families with places for wholesome recreation, laying the foundation for what is now known as domestic tourism in the country (ISTU, 2024).

The true boom of tourism arrived with the creation of key government entities. In 1961, the government founded the Instituto Salvadoreño de Turismo (ISTU). This entity was dedicated

to developing a network of recreational parks located throughout the country, including popular spots like Balboa Park and Cerro Verde Park, among others. This made leisure and recreation an accessible activity for the local population. This domestic tourism model prospered for several decades (ISTU, 2024).

During the 1970s, El Salvador's tourism sector experienced remarkable growth, driven by the construction of new hotels. In San Salvador, establishments such as the Camino Real, Ritz, Alameda, Siesta Hyatt Presidente and Terraza were built, while lodging options expanded to rural and coastal areas with the Hotel de Montaña on Cerro Verde and the Pacific Paradise and Izalco Cabaña Club resorts in the Jaltepeque Estuary, in addition to the start of construction of the Hotel Tesoro Beach (Peña Carrillo & Solares Inglés, 2002). This boom reached a peak in 1975; the year the country hosted the Miss Universe pageant. The celebration of this international event spurred an increase of more than 200,000 visitors, raising the total number of tourists to 300,000. This growth remained stable throughout the rest of the decade ("Antecedentes y situación actual del Turismo en El Salvador y la Montaña," n.d.).

The development of tourism in El Salvador was abruptly interrupted in the 1980s due to the outbreak of the civil war. This period of conflict led to a decline in both domestic and international visitors as infrastructure was damaged and safety concerns increased. Following the Peace Accords, tourism in El Salvador has gone through an unprecedented phase of recovery and modernization, driven by a new strategic vision. This period has been characterized by a strong investment in improving infrastructure and security, which has allowed the country to open up to a new type of visitor (Jover Martí, 2011).

In 1996, El Salvador's tourism sector was restructured with the creation of the Salvadoran Tourism Corporation (CORSATUR). The main objective of this new entity was to strengthen the

country's global competitiveness (“Corsatur”, 2020). From that same year, the ISTU was no longer responsible for international tourism promotion and, instead, dedicated itself exclusively to fostering "Family and Social Recreation" within the country through its network of 14 recreational parks, which included 11 aquatic and 3 natural ones (ISTU, 2024). This institutional framework was further developed when, on May 24, 2004, the Ministry of Tourism (MITUR) was created as the new governing body for the sector, tasked with determining and ensuring compliance with the National Tourism Policy and Plan (ISTU, 2022).

The evolution of tourism institutions in El Salvador reflects a progressive shift toward a more centralized and strategic management. From the first boards that operated with limited autonomy, through the creation of specialized entities like ISTU and CORSATUR, this evolution culminated with the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism (MITUR) in 2004. This entity not only unified previous efforts under a single roof but also established the foundation for a modern and coherent vision for tourism, seeking to consolidate the country as a world-class destination.

Once the institutional framework was established and centralized, the priority for these early governmental bodies was to create tangible recreational assets to serve the growing domestic demand and demonstrate the viability of the tourism sector. This commitment to organized recreation began with direct state investment in public spaces, leading directly to the development of the turicentros and the launch of the popular Buses Alegres program.

The Turicentros: A Legacy of the Poet Raúl Contreras

The institutionalization of tourism led to the creation of state-sponsored leisure destinations, a system mainly defined by the vision of poet and diplomat Raúl Contreras (ISTU, 2022). In Europe, Contreras received a decoration with the French Legion of Honor for diplomatic service. Returned to El Salvador in 1946, and immediately dedicated his efforts to

national tourism, aiming to provide a worthy place of recreation for the Salvadoran family (Palma, 2025).

Serving as President of the National Tourism Board (the precursor to ISTU) from 1947 to 1959, Contreras was responsible for the construction of eight iconic turicentros across El Salvador, transforming existing natural resources into accessible recreation sites for Salvadoran families (ISTU, 2022).

This construction effort, primarily during the 1950s, focused on diverse landscapes: Natural Parks: the first project was Parque Natural Balboa (Los Planes de Renderos), built in 1949 on 40 manzanas of coffee plantations, based on the design of Madrid's Parque del Oeste (ISTU, 2025a). Other natural turicentros include Los Chorros (Colón), known for its natural springs and its open-air amphitheater that hosted major events like the 1975 Miss Universe pageant. Contreras also established the Puerta del Diablo and Cerro Verde, the latter featuring a mountain hotel designed to observe the eruptions of the Izalco Volcano (Palma, 2025).

Aquatic Parks: four major parks were inaugurated, mostly in 1956. These included Atecozol (Izalco) and Apulo (Ilopango), which offer direct access to Lake Ilopango. Other destinations, including Ichanmichen (Zacatecoluca), known for its large slides and crystal-clear water, and Amapulapa (San Vicente), built on volcanic soil with seven natural pools, completed the network (Palma, 2025).

These eight turicentros—later complemented by others—formed the basis of the recreational network currently managed by ISTU (ISTU, 2024). This ambitious program created the first accessible domestic tourism product, facilitating Salvadorans to enjoy their natural heritage, a legacy that continued through the establishment of programs like the Buses Alegres.

Social Tourism: The "Buses Alegres" Program

The Buses Alegres program was born in January 1984 as part of an ISTU effort to promote family and social recreation in the country. It was launched alongside the "Caminatas Turísticas" (Tourist Hikes) program, operating under the "Sal si puedes" campaign, under the slogan "El que camina no contamina". In 1987, the ISTU officially formalized both programs, using Parque Libertad as the initial point of departure, which was later moved to Plaza General Gerardo Barrios in San Salvador (ISTU, 2022).

During the early 2000s, the buses continued to operate from Plaza General Gerardo Barrios every Sunday, providing Salvadoran families with transportation to ISTU parks at an accessible cost. Despite a temporary suspension due to the pandemic, the service returned using its traditional model, with older buses and customary meeting points, demonstrating its resilience.

Currently, the Buses Alegres program underwent a complete transformation. It now features a fleet of modern, air-conditioned buses, and the departure point is the parking lot of Parque Infantil de Diversiones. The service has shifted to a reservation-based model, where travelers must secure their spots in advance by phone or WhatsApp. The ISTU also publishes monthly itineraries on its social media channels. This modernization includes the offer of parking for those who travel in their own vehicles, demonstrating how the program has adapted to the needs of modern tourism (ISTU, 2025).

Ultimately, the "Buses Alegres" service has been a significant contribution to Salvadoran tourism, acting as a key asset for domestic travelers. By providing an accessible and affordable option for families, the program has allowed Salvadorans to explore and enjoy the country's diverse natural and cultural heritage, from its aquatic parks and nature reserves to its

archaeological sites. This service has been crucial in enabling the local population to experience the rich variety the country has to offer.

Regional Promotion and Thematic Circuits

The next significant evolution in tourism involved organizing the national territory into specific multi-destination circuits. This strategy gave rise to the most recognized thematic initiative in El Salvador: the Ruta de las Flores (The Flower Route). This circuit, which was initially developed in 1995 as a response to the coffee crisis, became the most visited and recognized multi-destination circuit in the country (Salguero, 2023; CORSATUR, 2022b). The name is due to the colorful flora that lines the route, which traverses the important Apaneca-Illamatepec Mountain Range, where elevations reach up to 2,381 meters above sea level (Centroamérica, 2025c; Salguero, 2023).

In 2014, the Legislative Assembly declared the National Day of the Ruta de las Flores via Legislative Decree N° 800 (Archila, 2023). This celebration takes place every first Sunday of October (Archila, 2023). This recognition underscores the route's significant economic impact, as it generates numerous local jobs and contributes to socioeconomic development across its six municipalities (Archila, 2023).

The Ministry of Tourism (MITUR) oversees the promotion of the destination and the mobilization of citizens for its annual celebration (Redacción UH, 2019). The route's comprehensive tourist offering includes wellness tourism (hot springs and historical cultural tours in Ahuachapán), adventure parks in Apaneca, and gastronomic variety in Salcoatitán (known for its gastronomic plaza) and Juayúa (home to the Christ of the Black Cross). It also features the beautiful murals of Concepción de Ataco and the renowned artisan crafts of Nahuizalco (Archila, 2023; Salvadorean Tours, 2019).

Furthermore, the Pueblos Vivos (Living Towns) program, launched in 2009, expanded this concept nationwide, successfully boosting domestic tourism by leveraging cultural festivals and local identity across hundreds of municipalities (Arecoa, 2013).

The success achieved through thematic circuits such as the Ruta de las Flores and the nationwide activation of Pueblos Vivos validated the potential of El Salvador's cultural and natural offerings. This regional success demonstrated a clear need to unify and formalize a single national identity to attract international visitors and capital, marking the shift from localized promotion to a cohesive, global marketing strategy—the Country Brand.

2.3.4 Country Brand and Global Positioning

The final pillar in the historical development of the tourism sector in El Salvador involves strategic marketing efforts to define and project the image of EL Salvador on the global stage.

In the 21st century, the image a country projects—its Country Brand—is recognized as a powerful tool that significantly impacts its economy, foreign policy, and global perception (MITUR, n.d.). This strategy is vital because tourism is the second primary source of income (after remittances) in El Salvador, and it has seen consistent growth (Expreso, 2013). National policy highlights tourism as a key activity that supports the economy, promotes cultural heritage, and inspires investment, aligning with core national values such as solidarity, tolerance, and pride. The strategy states that the identity must be created and strengthened through collaborative efforts between the government, the private sector, and social organizations (MITUR, n.d.).

The launch of a unified identity was a direct response to the urgent need to counteract negative international perceptions post periods of conflict and disaster. With the support of MITUR, the Country Brand of El Salvador was officially launched in November 2006 under the motto El Salvador Impresionante (El Salvador Impressive) (Morán Orellana & Caledonio, 2009).

This campaign built a positive, cohesive national image, centering the narrative on the rich natural beauty and culture of El Salvador. And actively promoted national icons, including Lake Coatepeque and the Ilamatepec Volcano complex, at international tourism fairs like FITUR in Spain in 2013, marking the first significant international positioning phase (Expreso, 2013).

The country brand later evolved to reflect national identity and resilience. On March 28, 2017, the official national slogan transitioned to El Salvador Grande como su gente (El Salvador Great like its People) (Expreso, 2019). This change in message strategically shifted the emphasis from general scenic beauty to human capital, considering them hardworking, talented, and competitive. This modern strategy includes a three-stage approach: National Pride, International Visibility, and Conquering Possibilities (MITUR, n.d.). Key results include Economic Impact. Over 200 Salvadoran companies across various sectors use the Country Brand as a seal of quality and a differentiating element, and Global Positioning: Coordinated promotion efforts led El Salvador to rise three positions for the first time in the 2017-2018 Country Brand Index for Latin America (Expreso, 2019).

The current focus leverages this new brand to drive niche specialization, notably through Surf Tourism and the Surf City initiative (Invest in El Salvador, 2022). This strategic specialization aims to break traditional paradigms, attract a high-value demographic, and demonstrate the country's commitment to a modernized, competitive, and globally visible sector (M., 2025).

The success of these national branding and specialization strategies—from the El Salvador Impresionante campaign to the current focus on Surf City—is measured by tangible results. To assess the effectiveness of these historical and strategic efforts, the focus now shifts to

the market performance, analyzing current tourism statistics, the origin of international visitors, and the direct economic impact generated by visitor expenditure.

2.3.5 Current Tourism Performance and Global Impact

Following the strategic developments in infrastructure and branding, the tourism sector has registered world-class growth, fundamentally altering El Salvador's position on the global stage.

An analysis by The Telegraph, based on UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) data, reveals that El Salvador is now a global tourism leader. The country is ranked third worldwide for the highest percentage increase in visitors since 2019, surpassed only by Qatar and Albania. 2024 Record: In 2024, the nation received 3.2 million international visitors, representing an 80% increase compared to pre-pandemic figures in 2019. This performance signifies El Salvador's emergence as a new favorite destination in a global context of uneven tourism recovery. Key Growth Factor (Security): The report highlights that the primary driver for this sudden surge is the dramatic improvement in public safety. The country's homicide rate, which stood at a high of 106.3 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015, dropped to 1.9 per 100,000 in 2024. This change has generated immense confidence among foreign tourists, particularly those from the Salvadoran diaspora (Rodas, 2025b).

By August 2024, El Salvador had received 2.6 million tourists, representing a substantial 21% increase compared to the same period in the previous year. This performance confirms its relevance as a key economic driver. The influx of visitors translates into a substantial economic benefit, with tourists having an average daily expenditure of \$143 per person, contributing a total revenue of \$2.486 billion USD to the Salvadoran economy as of August 2024 (Erazo, 2024b).

The origin of these international tourists reveals a focus on the regional and diaspora markets, which collectively represent 81% of the total: United States (42%): Occupies the top spot, primarily attributed to the Salvadoran diaspora visiting family, complemented by growing interest from other U.S. travelers in the beaches and natural attractions. The majority of these visitors arrive via air (Erazo, 2024b; Visual Media, 2025). Guatemala (24%) and Honduras (15%): These neighboring countries contribute significantly due to geographical proximity and easy overland connections, making El Salvador an ideal destination for short regional getaways. Connectivity remains balanced, with 54% of international visitors arriving via air and 46% via land (Erazo, 2024b; Visual Media, 2025).

Tourism growth is also strongly supported by the domestic market. During that same timeframe, 8.1 million Salvadorans visited public natural and cultural sites. This significant figure underscores the local population's increased interest in the country's attractions (Erazo, 2024b). The most visited destinations, registering a combined total of 9.8 million visits (national and international), include: The Puerto de La Libertad Tourist Complex, Parque Natural Balboa, Sunset Park, Parque Natural Puerta del Diablo (Erazo, 2024b). These trends underscore the optimistic projections for the close of 2024 and the beginning of 2025. Diversification of markets and strengthening of infrastructure remain key strategies for consolidating El Salvador as a premier regional tourism destination.

The history of tourism in El Salvador is a narrative of strategic, sequential development, progressing from basic terrestrial and recreational infrastructure to sophisticated global positioning. The pivotal moments—the establishment of the Ilopango hub, the investment in the modern international airport (1980), the formalization of thematic circuits like the Ruta de las Flores, and the evolution of the Country Brand—were all necessary precursors to the current

success. Ultimately, the robust 21% growth recorded in 2024, along with its significant economic impact, confirms the success of this long-term strategy of infrastructure investment and brand specialization, successfully repositioning El Salvador as a major tourism player in the region.

2.4 Natural Resources of Tour Destinations

El Salvador is commonly known as the "Land of Volcanoes" due to the historical and economic importance of its volcanic areas, which leverage the mineral richness of volcanic materials for agricultural fertility and aquifer recharge (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, n.d.). This geological foundation, combined with a tropical climate defined by two distinct seasons, a dry season and a rainy season—generates a diverse array of ecosystems. This section analyzes the country's most valuable natural assets for tourism, beginning with the specific biodiversity, forest and mountain protected areas, and hydrographic resources that form the basis of Echo Journeys tour offerings, before examining the fundamental soil types that influence plant life in El Salvador.

2.4.1 Forest and Mountain Protected Areas

The Forest and Mountain Protected Areas stand out as the most ecologically significant tourism resources in El Salvador. These high-altitude regions, characterized by rich Andisols (volcanic soils), host crucial ecosystems including cloud forests and dry tropical forests. These areas function as vital biological corridors and key water sources for the entire nation. Their importance extends beyond mere conservation; they represent the core of the country's biodiversity and offer the primary opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, and nature-based tourism. The following sections detail the six specific protected areas selected for the tour operations, highlighting the unique resources each one offers to the visitor.

2.4.1.1 El Boquerón National Park

El Boquerón National Park, located at the summit of the San Salvador Volcano (CORSATUR, 2022g). The volcano itself is a massive geological formation that spans two departments, covering districts such as Quezaltepeque, San Juan Opico, Colón, and Santa Tecla in the department of La Libertad, as well as the district of Nejapa in the department of San Salvador ("Volcán de San Salvador," 2024).

Founded by the government of El Salvador in 2008, El Boquerón is a protected natural area that covers an area of approximately 512 acres, situated at an altitude of 5,905 feet above sea level (Ventura, 2021). The main attraction of the park is a magnificent 1.5-kilometer-diameter crater, El Boquerón (The Big Mouth), which is 500 meters deep. Inside this crater, a smaller cone, known as the Boqueroncito (Little Big Mouth), formed during the last eruption in 1917 (Hotelgreciareal, 2020). As one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the country, it is a vital source of water and oxygen, sustaining countless plant and animal species. It is also considered a key lung for the San Salvador metropolitan area (Ventura, 2021).

The park offers a variety of trails, including viewpoints that allow us to admire both the crater and the capital city, providing spectacular panoramic views. It's an ideal place for hiking and photography. The cool climate of the cloud forest promotes the growth of lush flora, including ornamental plants, among which are notable hydrangeas and begonias. Regarding fauna, the park is home to species including the armadillo, raccoon, deer, and fox, among others (Corporación Salvadoreña de Turismo, 2021).

Figure 2.35

Panoramic View of El Boquerón: Main Crater of the San Salvador Volcano



Note. Photograph reprinted from Alemán (2022).

Figure 2.36

Modern Viewpoint within El Boquerón National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from La Gaceta (2023c).

Figure 2.37

Hiking Trail in El Boquerón



Note. Photograph reprinted from La Gaceta (2023d).

2.4.1.2 Puerta del Diablo Natural Park

Located on Mil Cumbres Street, El Cedro canton, in the municipality of Panchimalco and the department of San Salvador (ISTU, 2025c).

The name of the park, which translates to "Devil's Door," comes from a unique formation of two immense rocks that slice through the mountain, giving it the appearance of a gigantic gate opening to the landscape below (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-c). The name is also rooted in a local legend that describes the devil appearing in the area. This rocky zone revolves around three crags known to locals as El Chulo, El Chulito, and El Chulón. (ISTU, 2025c). Despite its name, it is a highly popular destination for hikers and tourists seeking panoramic views, including the town of Panchimalco and Cerro de las Pavas (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-c).

The main activity at the site is hiking to the top of the rock formations. The ascent is short and is suitable for most fitness levels (Puente & Figueroa, 2025). Its trails and viewpoints allow visitors to enjoy breathtaking views of Lake Ilopango, the San Vicente Volcano, and the Pacific Ocean on clear days (Erazo, 2024a). In addition to enjoying the scenic vistas, the area is ideal for

activities such as rock climbing and rappelling, as well as general hiking and photography (Puente & Figueroa, 2025; Erazo, 2024a).

Figure 2.38

Panoramic View of the Devil's Door Rock Formation



Note. Photograph reprinted from El Salvador Travel (n.d.-c)

Figure 2.39

Modern Tourist Infrastructure: Glass Bridge at the Devil's Door viewpoint



Note. Photograph reprinted from El Salvador Travel (n.d.-c).

2.4.1.3 Ecoparque El Espino

Located in the department of La Libertad, on the slopes of the San Salvador Volcano, and just 10 kilometers from the center of San Salvador city.

The Ecoparque is part of El Espino Nature Preserve, and environmental associations and specialists consider it to be the last lung of San Salvador. This protected area serves as the capital's last remaining coffee agroforest, playing a crucial role in recharging the city's groundwater deposits. The forest also regulates water runoff from the higher elevations, which helps prevent flooding in the lower-lying areas of the city. In addition to being a vital habitat for many wild species, it helps prevent soil erosion and contributes to purifying the air for the metropolitan area (Labrador, 2012).

The primary activity is hiking along the well-marked trails that wind through a diverse range of trees. The routes are of low difficulty, making them ideal for family hikes or for those seeking a more relaxed experience in nature. The park also has rest areas and viewpoints that offer scenic views of the city. A unique feature of the park is "El Infiernillo," a small area where you can observe volcanic steam emanating directly from the earth (Diario El Mundo, 2016). It is the perfect place for an easy hike and a quick escape from urban life.

For those seeking diverse activities, the forest is a key destination for mountain biking and extreme downhill cycling. The park also offers areas for paintball and designated camping spots. Furthermore, the Ecoparque provides overnight accommodations with four cabins (A. Baiza, direct observation, 2025).

Coffee plants dominate the ecosystem, but the shaded forest is home to a wide variety of tree species, including balsam, cypress, amate, ceiba, carao, and orange trees, among others (Ecoparque El Espino, n.d.). The Ecoparque hosts an innumerable number of species, including a

diversity of native and migratory fauna, some of which are easier to observe than others. It is common to see animals like butterflies, Blue-crowned Motmot, Turquoise-browed Motmot, armadillos, agoutis, white-throated magpie-jays, collared aracaris, and common spiny-tailed iguanas. Additionally, it is possible to hear the songs of many birds that inhabit the forest, even if they remain out of sight. The park is also home to species including white-tailed deer, raccoons, opossums, ferruginous pygmy-owls, and several types of non-venomous snakes (Ecoparque El Espino, n.d.).

Figure 2.40

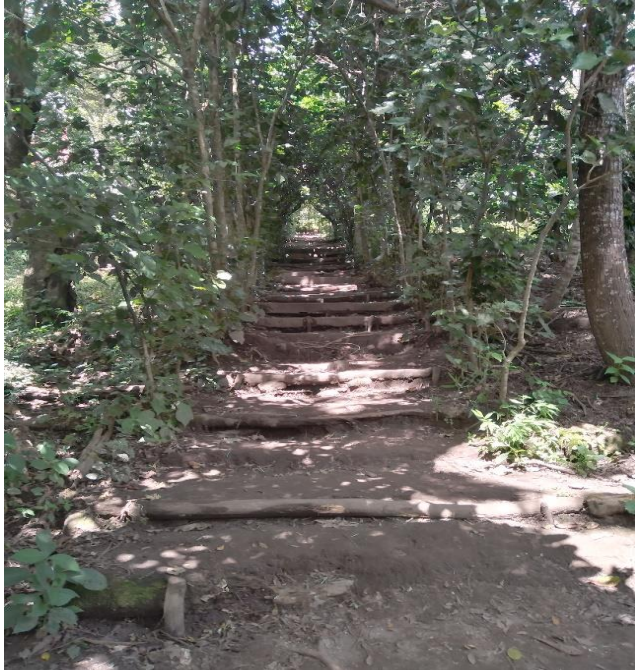
Entrance Sign of Ecoparque El Espino



Note. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2.41

Trail and Vegetation within Ecoparque El Espino



Note. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2.42

Trail and Vegetation within Ecoparque El Espino



Note. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2.43

Cabins Available for Tourists in Ecoparque El Espino



Note. Photograph by the author.

2.4.1.4 El Imposible National Park

Located in the department of Ahuachapán. It is considered the largest protected natural area in El Salvador (CORSATUR, 2022h).

The park owes its name to a mountainous pass that was once extremely dangerous for mules carrying coffee, making it "impossible" to cross (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-a). It is a significant remnant of a mature tropical dry forest, typical of the beginnings of Mesoamerica. Due to its countless biodiversity, it was declared a National Park. It serves as a vital refuge for endangered species and is a crucial source of water for the region ("Parque Nacional El Imposible," 2013).

The park's primary activity is hiking on its diverse trails. Bird watching, eco-camping, and nature photography are among the activities available at the park. The park also features rivers where visitors can cool off. Furthermore, the park harbors vestiges of pre-Hispanic

settlements, and Piedra Sellada is the only archaeological site currently open to the public. Scientific studies confirm that the forest contains eight archaeological sites from various pre-Hispanic periods, and additional sites may be discovered in the future ("Parque Nacional El Imposible," 2013).

The park is a biodiversity paradise. Its flora includes more than 400 species of trees, such as mahogany, ceiba, and balsam. Regarding fauna, it is a last refuge for animals such as the ocelot, collared peccary, paca, northern tamandua, margay, neotropical river otter, Mexican hairy porcupine, spider monkey, and the white-nosed coati. For bird lovers, it is a key destination where more than 250 species can be sighted, including the Crested Guan, White Hawk, Wood Stork, Osprey, Great Curassow, and the king vulture ("Parque Nacional El Imposible," 2013).

Figure 2.44

Aerial View of the Vast Forest Extension of El Imposible National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from El Salvador Travel (n.d.-b).

Figure 2.45

View of El Imposible Forest from a Tourist Lookout



Note. Photograph reprinted from El Salvador Travel (n.d.-b).

Figure 2.46

Hydrographic Basin in El Imposible National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from Palma (2024). Original image rights held by SalvaNATURA.

2.4.1.5 Montecristo National Park

Located in the city of Metapán, in the Santa Ana department, about 117 km from San Salvador (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-b). It is part of the Trifinio-Fraternidad Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, a conservation area shared with Guatemala and Honduras (CORSATUR, 2022e). Known for its cloud forest, a unique and fragile ecosystem located at an altitude of 2,400 meters above sea level. It's cool climate, with temperatures ranging from 6 °C to 18 °C (43 °F to 64 °F), makes it an ideal destination for nature lovers. (CORSATUR, 2022e). It was the first protected area in El Salvador. It is a sanctuary of biodiversity that contributes to the protection of the region's resources (Rodas, 2025a).

The park offers a unique hiking experience, allowing you to breathe in the fresh, pure air while taking in the forest's breathtaking beauty. In addition to its forests of giant trees, crystal-clear rivers and creeks with ice-cold water (Rodríguez Medrano, 2011). Montecristo National Park features the "Garden of a Hundred Years," a sanctuary that is home to over 198 species and 72 genera of orchids (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, 2024). This famous garden is home to trees that are more than a century old, tree ferns, as well as a wide variety of flowers, including agapanthus, hydrangeas, and calla lilies, among other ornamental flowers (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-b). For those looking for an overnight stay, camping in designated areas and cabin rentals are available (MARN, 2025). The park's diverse ecosystem is home to a wide array of wildlife. Here, you can watch hummingbirds' flit among vibrant bromeliads and spot beautiful butterflies fluttering along the trails. With a bit of luck, you might even catch a glimpse of a deer, and for a truly rare and memorable sighting, you might be fortunate enough to spot a majestic quetzal (MARN, 2025).

The cool climate of the cloud forest sustains the growth of lush flora, featuring an abundance of moss and lichens that cover nearly every tree. The park is home to trees that are approximately 700 years old (Rodríguez Medrano, 2011). The forests of liquidambar oaks, cypresses, and pines are abundant, creating a breathtaking and impressive landscape. The secondary vegetation is composed of species such as Guanacastes, Jatobás, and Chapernos, among others. (El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-b). Regarding fauna, the park is home to species including mammals such as margays, armadillos, opossums, agoutis, and collared peccaries. And birds like emerald toucanets, owls, tanagers, and berylline hummingbirds (CORSATUR, 2022e; El Salvador Turismo, n.d.-b; MARN, 2025).

Figure 2.47

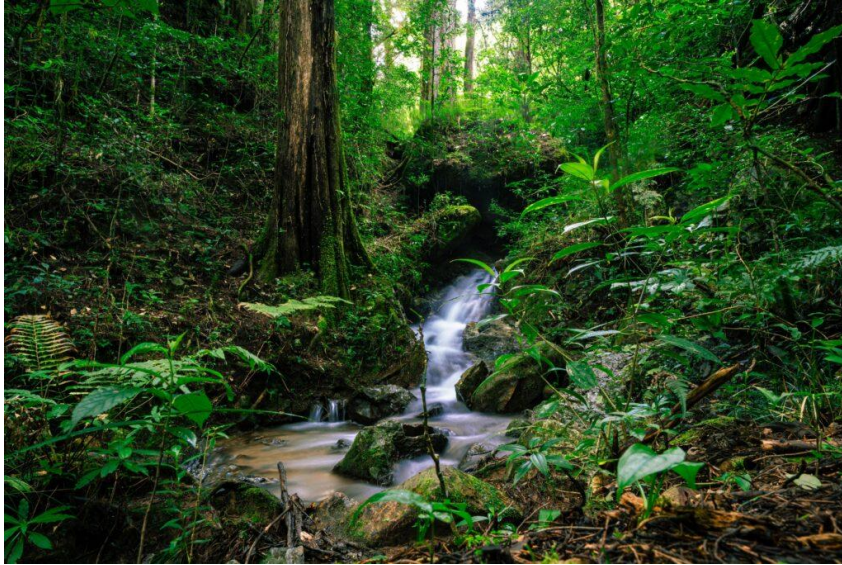
Hiking Trail at Montecristo National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from MARN (2025).

Figure 2.48

River within Montecristo National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from MARN (2025).

Figure 2.49

Forest Path and Vegetation in Montecristo National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from La Gaceta (2023b).

2.4.1.6 Cerro Verde Natural Park

Located in the Apaneca mountain range in the department of Santa Ana (Centroamérica, 2025b). The park revolves around the Cerro Verde volcano, which has the Nahuatl name Cuntetepeque, meaning Mountain of Mists. It is an inactive volcano, standing at 2,030 meters above sea level, with its crater eroded and covered by a dense cloud forest. It is an inactive volcano, standing at 2,030 meters above sea level; its crater is eroded and covered by a dense cloud forest. Its last eruption is estimated to have occurred approximately 25,000 years ago (Centroamérica, 2025b). The park offers a cool, pleasant climate, allowing visitors to explore its network of trails and scenic viewpoints while appreciating the rich biodiversity of the region (CORSATUR, 2022f).

The park features two interpretive trails: "The Mysterious Flowers" and "A Window to Nature" (CORSATUR, 2022f). For the more intrepid and adventurous, the park offers access to challenging hikes to the nearby Izalco volcano, which rises to 1,980 meters, and the Santa Ana volcano, known as Ilamatepec, which rises to 2,381 meters above sea level (ISTU, 2025b). These popular hiking destinations are an excellent way to challenge your physical abilities while enjoying the scenery. At Cerro Verde, visitors can enjoy a beautiful orchid garden and viewpoints that offer spectacular views. From these spots, it is possible to admire the majesty of the Izalco and Santa Ana volcanoes, as well as Lake Coatepeque and the picturesque towns of Juayúa, Nahuizalco, and Acajutla with its port (Centroamérica, 2025b). The park offers several cabins for lodging. These accommodations are nestled within the natural environment and boast stunning views of the volcanoes (ISTU, 2025b).

Cerro Verde is an excellent place to appreciate the rich flora and fauna of El Salvador. Cerro Verde is considered one of the richest forests of the region in terms of vegetation and air

quality. Its trees are native to cloud forests, and their foliage remains green year-round due to the moisture from the soil, air, and constant mists. This unique ecosystem is a perfect home for epiphytes—plants that grow on the branches of trees—especially orchids and bromeliads ("Cerro Verde (Clima, flora Y fauna)," 2014).

This location also serves as a refuge for a great variety of animals. The most notable inhabitants of the park are birds. A total of 127 species has been recorded, including 17 species of hummingbirds. Among them is the Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*), considered one of the smallest birds in the world ("Cerro Verde (Clima, flora Y fauna)," 2014). It weighs just over two grams when its stomach is full and can easily be mistaken for an insect while in flight (Thurber, 1978). Another common species found in the park is the Slate-colored Solitaire (*Myadestes unicolor*), which is considered one of the world's five best songbirds ("Cerro Verde Clima, flora Y fauna," 2014). The park is also a habitat for a diverse range of amphibians, some reptiles, and a wide variety of insects, including a rare species of giant butterfly ("Lugares de turismo," n.d.).

Figure 2.50

Aerial View of Cerro Verde National Park



Note. Photograph reprinted from Centroamérica (2025b).

2.4.2 Hydrographic Resources

El Salvador's diverse hydrographic resources substantially bolster its natural wealth, providing essential ecological services and significant recreational opportunities. The nation is home to numerous rivers, lakes, and impressive waterfalls, all of which are crucial for maintaining local biodiversity, sustaining agriculture, and offering settings for various water-based tourism activities. As the country's population continues to grow, these bodies of water, often located within volcanic craters or mountainous regions, are increasingly vital to the tourism sector. The following sub-sections detail the two key hydrographic destinations selected for our tour itineraries, focusing on their natural features and the unique experiences they offer visitors.

2.4.2.1 Los Tercios Waterfall

This waterfall is in the Las Ánimas ravine, 1.5 kilometers from the city of Suchitoto, Cuscatlán, El Salvador, on the road to Cinquera ("Cascada los tercios," n.d.).

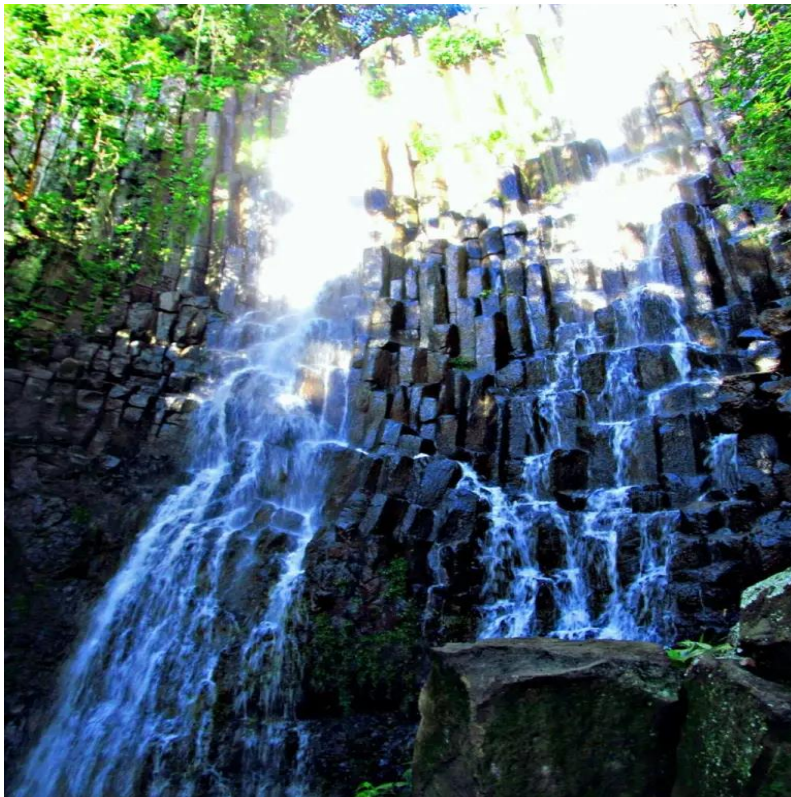
The waterfall is an exceptional rock formation consisting of a 10-meter-high vertical wall. This wall is composed of finely carved, hexagonal blocks of stone, over which the water gracefully falls ("Cascada los tercios," n.d.). This waterfall is a remarkable natural attraction due to its unique formation of basalt columns. As a rare geological phenomenon, it draws the attention of both tourists and geologists. While the cascade is at its most impressive during the rainy season, the distinctive rock structure makes it a compelling site to visit throughout the entire year (Todoturismo, n.d.).

The hike to the base of the waterfall is relatively short but presents a physical challenge. The trail requires visitors to descend over a rocky path to reach the river, offering a unique opportunity to view the cascade from below. The return trip to the starting point involves a strenuous climb back up the rocks. From the trailhead, visitors can enjoy stunning views of Lake

Suchitlán (Orellana, 2017). The main activities available include walking along the natural trails, observing the local flora and fauna, and taking photos. It is also a popular place for picnics and relaxation (Todoturismo, n.d.). For the more adventurous, they can rappel on the waterfall (Sagastume, 2024). Additionally, in the dry season, some visitors even dare to climb the rock formation. The best time to visit the waterfall is during the rainy season, from May to October, as it is often dry for the rest of the year (Todoturismo, n.d.). Nestled in lush, exuberant vegetation, the waterfall offers visitors a chance to appreciate the local flora and fauna typical of the region's humid tropical climate.

Figure 2.51

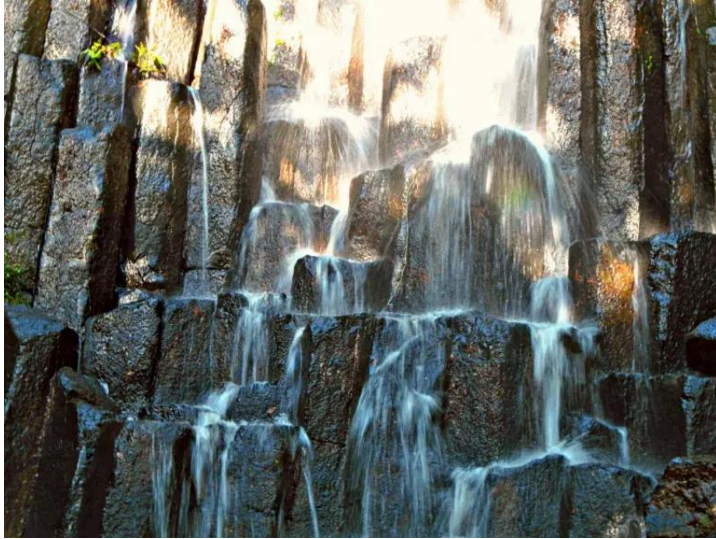
Los Tercios Waterfall



Note. Photograph reprinted from Orellana (2017).

Figure 2.52

Detail of the Hexagonal Basalt Columns at Los Tercios Waterfall



Note. Photograph reprinted from Orellana (2017).

2.4.2.2 Lake Güija

Located on the border between two countries, Lake Güija spans two departments and three municipalities: Metapán and San Antonio Pajonal in Santa Ana (El Salvador), and Asunción Mita in Jutiapa (Guatemala) (PREPAC et al., n.d.).

Covering an area of 45 km², Lake Güija is shared between El Salvador (74%) and Guatemala (26%). The lakes basin spans 178 km², with an average depth of 15 meters and a maximum depth of 21 meters. This ecosystem serves as a vital habitat for countless flora and fauna. Its significance also extends to the cultural sphere, as the area has been the setting for significant archaeological discoveries (Herrera, 2023a). The Salvadoran side of Lake Güija features several islands, including Teotipa, Tule, and Iguatepec. The latter is of archaeological significance, as numerous pieces of pre-Columbian pottery have been discovered there (El Salvador Travel, n.d.-a). Additionally, Lake Güija is distinguished by being surrounded by the most extensive tropical dry forest on volcanic lava in the North Pacific of

Mesoamerica (PREPAC et al., n.d.). These aspects underscore the lake's historical and cultural value, in addition to its natural richness.

With its cool climate, crystal-clear waters, and lush green foliage, Lake Güija is a perfect spot for ecotourism (Herrera, 2023a). Available activities include hiking, birdwatching, boat tours, and simply relaxing to appreciate the view. A visit to the petroglyphs and the islands of Teotipa, Tule, and Ihualtepec is also a must-do experience (El Salvador viajar, n.d.).

Boat tours are a key activity. They offer a chance to explore Ihualtepec Hill, which is a peninsula for most of the year but turns into an island during the rainy season. Visitors can hike to the hill's summit to see the remnants of an ancient wall, structures, a pyramid, and other petroglyphs (El Salvador viajar, n.d.). For those seeking more adventure, the Guajoyo River, which flows from the lake, provides opportunities for rafting, kayaking, sailing, and traditional fishing (El Salvador Travel, n.d.-a).

The biodiversity of Lake Güija is notable, hosting a wide variety of flora and fauna species. Regarding flora, the surrounding vegetation is highly diverse, including a variety of shrubs, wild plants, and trees. Among the most prominent species are the nance, cedar, Peruvian almond, mahogany, granadillo, rubber, and firebush. Regarding fauna, more than 48 types of mammals have been registered, along with an abundant presence of reptiles. Among the latter, various species of lizards and snakes stand out, such as boas and vipers (El Salvador Travel, n.d.-a; El Salvador viajar, n.d.).

The lake is a point of great importance for avifauna, serving as a habitat for 220 species of birds, including resident and migratory species. Among the most notable waterfowl are the Blue-winged Teal, the Fulvous Whistling-Duck, the American Coot, the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, the Lesser Scaup, and the Agami Heron. It's worth noting that in the context of

the lake, El Salvador is the only country to have recorded the Agami Heron. The area is also home to songbirds like the Northern Mockingbird, Spot-breasted Oriole, and Orchard Oriole (Herrera & Ibarra Portillo, 2005).

Figure 2.53

Güija Lake



Note. Photograph reprinted from CORSATUR (2022c).

The combination of protected mountain areas and unique hydrographic features provides a robust foundation for El Salvador's nature-based tourism. The destinations selected—ranging from the high-altitude cloud forest of Montecristo to the tranquil waters of Lago de Güija—offer a comprehensive and diverse array of experiences for our clientele. The geographical distribution and relative proximity of these eight natural resources across the country are illustrated in **Figure 2.54**.

Figure 2.54

El Salvador Resource and Destination Map



Note. Adapted by the author from El Salvador mi País (2015) to include specific destination locations.

2.4.3 Soil Types of El Salvador

In El Salvador, agriculture is a fundamental activity, making the country's soils a prominent and vital characteristic. Given its volcanic geography and varied topography, El Salvador presents a rich diversity of soil types. These soils are classified based on their origin, physical and chemical properties, which directly influence their fertility and productive capacity. The most representative soil types in the country include (Arévalo Santos, 2015):

1. **Andisols:** (Volcanic Soils): These are the most widespread soils in El Salvador, formed from volcanic ash and materials. They are characterized by being deep, friable, highly permeable, and having a high-water retention capacity. They are generally very fertile due to their high organic matter and nutrient content, making

them ideal for a wide range of crops, including coffee, basic grains, and vegetables. However, they may present limitations in phosphorus availability.

2. **Alluvial:** Located in coastal plains and river valleys (such as the Lempa River Valley), these soils are deposits of sediments transported by rivers. They are highly productive and allow for intensive, mechanized agriculture. They are typically deep and well-drained, with good natural fertility, making them pillars to produce basic grains and other short-cycle crops.
3. **Latosols (Reddish Clay):** These soils, which predominate in hills and mountains, have a distinctive reddish color due to their iron oxide content. They are well-developed soils with a blocky structure and are generally suitable for a diversity of crops. There are also Acidic Clay Latosols, which are deeper, older, and have lower fertility due to their acidity and low nutrient content, making them more suitable for reforestation or crops that tolerate these conditions.
4. **Regosol:** These are young and poorly developed soils, consisting of loose, often fine, sandy, and gray-colored material, which predominate across various topographies, from slopes to coastal zones. Their surface layer can be precarious, so their use is mainly recommended for permanent vegetation such as coconut, cashew, or pastures.
5. **Lithosol:** They are stony and shallow, resting on hard rock, tuff, or lava. Their agricultural yield is low due to their limited depth and abundance of stones, making them more suitable for forestry uses or crops adapted to adverse conditions.

6. **Grumosol:** These are very clayey soils, ranging from gray to black, and they tend to be difficult to cultivate due to their high plasticity and low permeability, which can affect plant root development. They are not suitable for high-value commercial permanent crops.
7. **Halomorphic Soils:** These soils are saline, which predominate in mangrove areas or coastal zones influenced by tides. They are poorer for crop production due to their high salt content.

Understanding the characteristics of each soil type is crucial for agricultural planning, sustainable management practices, and the conservation of this vital resource in El Salvador.

2.5 Cultural Identity and Intangible Tourism Resources

Despite its small geographic size, El Salvador is a nation immensely rich in culture. Salvadoran identity is built not only from its impressive landscapes and natural resources, but also from its traditions, beliefs, and customs. This section delves into the heart of the country, exploring the intangible elements that bring every corner to life: its festivities, which celebrate faith and harvest; its gastronomy, which tells stories in every dish; the legends that explain the unexplainable; and the syncretisms that merge the past with the present. Through these cultural resources, we seek to offer a complete immersion into the essence that makes El Salvador a truly unique destination.

2.5.1 El Boquerón National Park

The San Salvador Volcano is an imposing formation with an elevation of 1,867 meters above sea level. According to research, the volcano lost 1,000 meters of height in massive eruptions more than 60,000 years ago, which shaped its current structure (MARN, 2010). The volcano has two peaks: the highest, El Picacho, and the main crater, El Boquerón (Hispanopedia,

2024b). The volcano is in the central zone of El Salvador, spanning the municipalities of Quezaltepeque, San Juan Opico, Colón, Santa Tecla, and Nejapa (Campos Morán et al., 2017). Situated just 11 km from the capital, it is a key destination that fuses natural beauty with a rich history.

Figure 2.55

El Boquerón and El Picacho: Two Distinct Features of the San Salvador Volcano



Note. Photograph reprinted from Alemán (2022).

2.5.1.1 Volcano History

The night of the Corpus Christi celebration in 1917 became a historical event. On June 7, two powerful earthquakes shook the country, triggering an eruption that lasted until June 10. The tremors triggered the volcano's eruption, which originated not from its main crater, El Boquerón, but from seven cracks that opened secondary craters known as Los Chintos. It was precisely thanks to these fissures that the city of San Salvador was saved from widespread destruction, as they acted as escape valves, diverting the lava flow to the north and blocking a section of the railway line between Quezaltepeque and Sitio del Niño (Cañas Dinarte, 2020).

Figure 2.56

Lava Flow Damage to Infrastructure: Railway Blocked Between Quezaltepeque and Sitio del Niño



Note. Archival photograph of lava flows blocking the railway line between Quezaltepeque and Sitio del Niño. Reprinted from Cañas Dinarte (2023). Photo source: Carlos Cañas Dinarte.

Figure 2.57

Excursionists Viewing the Still-Smoking Fissure of El Pinar



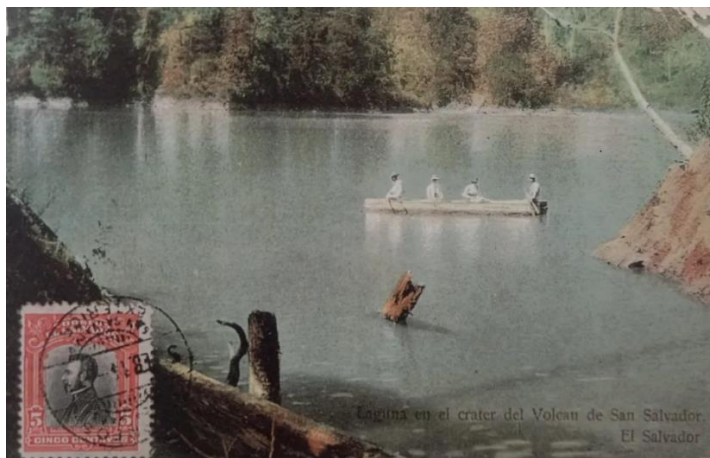
Note. Archival photograph showing the Pinar fissure on the northern side of the Boquerón volcano, late July 1917. Reprinted from Cañas Dinarte (2023). Photo source: Carlos Cañas Dinarte.

This eruption had devastating consequences: it caused the death of over 1,000 people, destroyed more than 8,000 homes, and severely damaged the surrounding municipalities (Cornejo, 2024). Among the public buildings that survived the tragedy are the National Palace and Theater, as well as the Rosales Hospital. Conversely, other buildings, such as the Central Post Office, the School of Medicine, and the Orphanage Hospice, were rendered useless (Cañas Dinarte, 2023).

The main crater of the San Salvador volcano, known as El Boquerón, once held a beautiful emerald-green lake, a feature described by U.S. Consul Ephraim G. Squier in 1855 (Calderón, 2024a). The volcanic activity following the June 1917 eruptions consumed this body of water. In its place, a new cone of lapilli and ash emerged, creating a new volcano known as "El Boqueroncito" (Lardé y Larín, 1978).

Figure 2.58

The San Salvador Volcano Lagoon, Lost During the 1917 Eruption



Note. Historical photograph, Laguna en el cráter del volcán de San Salvador, taken in 1914. Reprinted from Calderón (2024a). Original source: San Salvador, el esplendor de una ciudad 1880-1930 (Herodier).

Figure 2.59

El Boqueroncito: Inner Crater During the 1917 San Salvador Volcano Eruption



Note. Archival photograph reprinted from Cañas Dinarte (2023). Photo source: Carlos Cañas Dinarte.

2.5.1.2 Chronicles and oral accounts

Beyond historical data and statistics, a people's history grows from the testimonies and personal experiences passed down through generations. These oral narratives, which capture people's emotions and feelings, are an intangible resource that brings history to life. The 1917 eruption of the San Salvador Volcano is one of those events that lives on not only in records but in the chronicles of those who lived through it.

A Poet's Testimony from the Rosales Hospital. A particularly moving account comes from the Colombian poet Miguel Ángel Osorio, better known by his pseudonyms Ricardo Arenales and Porfirio Barba Jacob. Osorio was a patient at the Rosales Hospital in San Salvador when the earthquakes and eruption occurred (Calderón, 2024c). His novelized testimony, captured in writing, offers a human and agonizing perspective of the disaster, narrating the events from within the chaos. The following fragments of his account are from an article by Beatriz Calderón published on La Prensa Gráfica's website in 2024. The original Spanish texts have been translated into English by the authors of this work.

The poet describes how the first quake took them by surprise, with a "strong swaying of the building and an indescribable noise" that left them speechless. Despite a brief pause, a "vague premonition of something horrible" crossed the soul of the city, announcing the unspeakable terror that was to come (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

The moment of greatest horror arrives when the eruption begins. Osorio watches in terror as a "red column about 50 meters high, wide at the base, surrounded by black and dense smoke" rises in the distance. A sinister glow illuminates the sky, and people hear "walls falling with infernal noise" as sparks spread across the horizon. The scene at the hospital was one of

complete desperation, with "desperate wails, prayers asking for mercy from the heavens, [and] screams of fright" rising from the courtyard (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

In his account, the poet describes a terrified crowd running from place to place. The anguish was so great that thirst became an unbearable torment, and though they cried out for water, the author concludes that "no one hears us, neither heaven nor earth." Finally, amid the terror and helplessness, the poet summarizes the experience, stating that he and his friend were "the most perfect representation of human weakness in the face of the blind and inexorable forces of nature." (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

During the confusion and chaos, the horror of the tragedy began to take on a human and personal face. The poet describes the arrival of the first victim:

An automobile approaches at full speed; we see how it suddenly twists the straight line of its path. We see it retreat and advance with abrupt jolts, as the ground under its tires comes and goes. And a woman, whose self-sacrifice makes owner of superhuman strength, descends under the doors of the hospital. She brings her husband, his legs shattered. He is the first victim of the hecatomb (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

And it is then that we think of the magnitude of the pain. In the city, in the towns, in the countryside, human beings are falling everywhere under the collapsing walls. Where are you, fathers, brothers, sons, spouses? In what place has this cataclysm surprised you? Under what stone do you now sleep your last dream, or do you remain screaming, half-dead, in the dust and perhaps almost in the midst of the flames? Horror! Horror! (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

Suddenly, the confusion turned into a collective panic as a new piece of news spread.

Suddenly, a shout rings out from the road to Santa Tecla, which gets closer by the minute. And a little later, an avalanche of about a hundred people—especially women and

children—rushes towards the center of the city. Their voices now reveal the paroxysm of anguish:

"The volcano has burst! The lava is coming! God, Holy, Mercy! We are burning! Everyone to San Jacinto!" And those people run and run, and as they pass, they drag with them the less reflective and more terrified (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

The account culminates with a desire for peace in the face of chaos, a yearning for the end of all suffering.

A violent tremor surprises us in this fantastic flight, and we hear a mournful clamor rising from the entire vast street. And we wish for death: That it all may end at once! That the mountains may crash against one another! That the air may ignite and consume us like light straws in its flames! But that this horrible torment may cease and nothingness may receive us in its merciful embrace (Osorio, as cited in Calderón, 2024c).

The Jabalí and the Tango. The San Salvador volcano is a volcanic complex comprising three main masses: the high peak, El Picacho (1,960m); the central crater, El Boquerón (1,839m); and a smaller elevation to the northeast of the crater, El Jabalí (1,397m). Due to its shape, the inhabitants of that era recognized the entire prominence as "El Jabalí." The complex also includes other small, inactive craters, such as La Joya, Puerta de la Laguna, and El Playón (Hurtado, 2018).

In 1917, San Salvador was very different from today. The city only extended from the San Miguelito neighborhood to the Acelhuate River and from El Calvario Church to what is now known as "the Avenue." Its houses were of "adobe and bahareque," and its streets lit by "lanterns." During the earthquake, these lanterns fell to the ground. San Salvador was left in darkness, illuminated only by the glow of the volcanic eruption (Hurtado, 2018).

In the aftermath of the eruption, the city's residents believed Cerro El Jabalí had become active, thereby grappling with the traumas. A song that reflected this sentiment in its verses became popular (Chicas, 2025). The following is the original Spanish version of the song, followed by an English translation provided by the authors of this work:

Spanish Version (Original)

Siete de junio Noche fatal,

Bailó el tango La Capital.

¿Quién te botó?

¡Yo me caí!

Por ir huyendo Del Jabalí.

English Translation

The seventh of June, A fatal night,

The Capital danced a tango.

Who knocked you down?

I fell to myself!

From running away, from El Jabalí.

2.5.1.3 Stories and Legends

While the poet's and tango's accounts give us a perspective on the 1917 event, these stories include a body of legends that circulated orally among the survivors. These legends, compiled in a 2017 study by Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador (UTEC), offer a more intimate look at the people's experience. The legends were originally documented in Spanish by researchers from Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador (UTEC, 2017). The English versions presented in this work are translations produced by the authors.

Below, three of these stories are presented here, showing different aspects of human nature in the face of tragedy: a miracle of faith and divine protection, a lesson about attachment to material possessions and loss, and a tragicomic tale that reminds us that even in despair, a trace of humor and humanity coexist.

The Church That Didn't Burn. This church had a cross a few meters in front of it as a religious symbol; it was a gathering point for religious celebrations. It was the only witness left after all the parishioners evacuated. Days after the eruption, when the priest and members of the community returned to rescue the church's goods, they found that the lava had passed on both sides of the building. It was the only witness left after all the parishioners evacuated. Days after the eruption, when the priest and members of the community returned to rescue the church's goods, they found that the lava had passed on both sides of the building. The extreme heat scorched the walls, but the lava never passed over the church itself. Somehow, the lava flow split into two in front of the guardian cross, creating two rivers that rejoined to continue their path of destruction (Campos Morán et al., 2017).

The Burned Chinese Man. During the eruption, local authorities went around advising people to evacuate their homes and head to safer areas. Some went to Quezaltepeque, others to San Juan Opico, and several sought refuge with relatives in more distant places. Among the residents of the area was a Chinese immigrant who owned a store in the zone to be evacuated, as authorities warned that the lava would reach that spot and cover everything.

However, for reasons unknown, he decided to stay in his business. A neighbor, one of the few who had a relationship with him, tried to dissuade him, but he refused, arguing that even if the lava came, nothing would happen to him. When the authorities came to remove the people who remained, they could not find him as he had hidden. Later, they confirmed that the heat and

the lava consumed his store, and no trace of him remained. Most residents of the area's cantons agree that he was so materialistic that he preferred to die rather than leave his belongings. Today, in the place where his store once stood, only some black stones remain, witnesses to the death that claimed a life paid with an attachment to things (Campos Morán et al., 2017).

The Drunk Guide. Following the eruption, the atmosphere in the communities on the volcano's flanks was one of insecurity and an urgent need to flee. Thus, Don Antonio's grandfather was in a great hurry to escape and rejoin the rest of his family in Quezaltepeque. During the night, groups of families were leaving their homes in waves with no clear direction of where to go. It was one of these groups that, late at night, was surprised by the shout of a man who said that the lava was coming from below and that they had to go as high as possible to avoid it.

So, upon hearing "the lava is coming!", everyone, instead of going down, went up. Fifteen minutes into their ascent, however, they heard "the lava is coming!" again, this time warning that it was coming from above. The people, confused, went back down the same path towards Quezaltepeque, when suddenly, for a third time, the cry of "the lava is coming!" was heard, indicating that it was coming from below. However, before people could run back up, one of the men reprimanded the guide, only to find that he was a bolo shouting orders frantically, and the people, faced with the stress of not knowing what to do, listened to the first voice they heard. They later found government personnel who helped them get down the mountain; the drunk man left along with the others (Campos Morán et al., 2017).

2.5.1.4 A Salvadoran Tradition

Beyond the oral stories and legends that circulate, the memory of the San Salvador volcano eruption lives on through an annual tradition. In the municipality of Nejapa, the "Bolas

de Fuego" (Fireballs) festival symbolically commemorates the rain of fire that fell from the volcano, showing that a tragic event can become a form of collective memory and cultural celebration.

The Bolas de Fuego of Nejapa

The *Bolas de Fuego* (Fireballs) tradition dates back to the volcano's eruption at the beginning of the millennium, commemorating the incandescent stones that erupted; However, its origin remains uncertain, as there are two versions: one tells that Saint Jerome, the patron of Nejapa, was tempted by the devil, who threw fireballs at him; the other, which is related to the 1917 eruption, says that the tradition arose to commemorate that the lava did not damage the city and that the image of the saint prevented the disaster (Campos Morán et al., 2017).

The "fireballs" or "*la recuerda*," as it is also known locally, is a traditional game that began in 1922 and consists of a confrontation between two groups of men throwing flaming balls at each other. The balls—the indispensable weapon in this battle—are made of rags fastened with wire. The city's inhabitants collaborate by providing the cloth, and once ready, the balls are left to soak in gasoline for a minimum period of one month to ensure they will stay lit for an extended duration. Participants manufacture an average of one thousand balls each year, and the event is celebrated on the last day of August, regardless of weather conditions (Campos Morán et al., 2017). Around 8:30 at night, the two sides position themselves on the city's main street, while spectators of all ages settle in to witness the event. The pungent smell of gasoline, intense heat, and the painted faces of the participants—a way to identify themselves and enhance the game—fill the atmosphere, creating a mood of euphoria. Increasingly, young people are joining the

organization and staging of the "*recuerda*," ensuring the continuity of this tradition (Campos Morán et al., 2017).

Figure 2.60

The Balls of Fire Festival in Nejapa: A Cultural Tourist Attraction



Note. Photograph reprinted from ultimahsv (2025).

Beyond the testimonies and legends, the memory of the San Salvador volcano resides in the daily consciousness of the population. Today, the street leading to the Boquerón is a meeting place filled with cafes, pupuserías, and restaurants. This vibrant, lively atmosphere is a reminder that while the past is part of the collective memory, the community has found a space of resilience and living tradition in this place, uniting its history with its present.

2.5.2 Puerta del Diablo Natural Park

The origin of the two rocks at the Devil's Gate has a geological explanation. The formation occurred on October 8, 1762. Intense rains undermined the base of Cerro El Chulo, a hill that was previously "compact and homogenous." As a result, a considerable portion collapsed with a thunderous roar, rolling into the abyss (Lardé y Larín, 2000). Other versions attribute the separation to meteorological cataclysms that took place at the end of the 18th century, specifically in 1772, 1774, and 1781. A final heavy storm in 1906 caused large landslides that permanently separated the two enormous rocks, giving rise to the structure we know today (ISTU, 2025c).

From Cerro El Chulo to The Devil's Door

Before its current name, it was named Cerro El Chulo ("Place of the fugitive"). Its reputation for being haunted already existed, with tales of ghostly apparitions and sightings of strange lights, causing locals to shun it. This mysticism persisted through oral tradition (Erazo, 2024a). Recognizing its growing reputation and tourist potential, the writer and poet Raúl Contreras, president of the National Tourism Board, officially named the site The Devil's Door in 1950. He was motivated by his interest in the country's mythology and the appeal of a "haunted place" (Erazo, 2024a; Herrera, 2023b). Today, the mystical value of the place persists, and historians claim that at the foot of the rocks, some witch doctors perform rituals, thereby keeping alive the mysterious aura that has characterized the place since its origins (Erazo, 2024a).

2.5.2.1 The Legend of the Devil's Door

An ancient legend surrounds this curious rock formation, explaining its iconic name. In colonial times, the property belonged to the Renderos family. The Devil himself, disguised as a

man, took an interest in the beautiful daughter of the landowner, María de La Paz. When she did not return his affection, he kidnapped her, filled with rage, and took her to a cave in the area. Her father, Don Rosendo Renderos, discovering the abduction, launched a relentless pursuit through the mountains, along with the villagers, to hunt him down. Finding himself cornered, the Devil, who was on a black horse, struck the large rock with a supernatural force to open a path of escape, forming a perfect arch—a kind of gate—through which the malevolent figure could flee. Since then, the place became known as The Devil's Gate, a name that pays homage to the dramatic escape, according to legend, that shaped this unique landscape (La Gaceta, 2023a; English translation by the authors).

Figure 2.61

The Devil Courting María de la Paz: The Legend Behind El Salvador's Devil's Door



Note. Image created by A. Baiza by using Gemini. Prompt: "The Devil disguised as a man courting María de la Paz in a colonial setting, where she rejects him, illustrating the legend of the Puerta del Diablo (2025, September 10).

Figure 2.62

The Devil's Escape: Breaking the Rocks to Form the Devil's Door



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini. Prompt: "The Devil disguised as a man fleeing on a black horse, striking and breaking the rock formations to create a passage, thus forming the Devil's Door in a colonial setting" (2025, September 10).

Another version of the story offers a different take on the events. According to this account, the young María de la Paz fell in love with a local indigenous man; however, the town's inhabitants opposed their union, claiming the young woman was under an evil influence. Despite this, the couple ignored them, and one night the Devil abducted María and killed the indigenous man who tried to defend her.

When the young woman's father found out, he went in search of the demon. To his surprise, he found the malevolent entity transformed into a bull. Finally, the demon dragged the father and threw him into the abyss. Unlike the other version, this story focuses on the tragic fate of its characters and adds an element of indigenous culture and animal symbolism to the narrative (Herrera, 2023b; English translation by the authors).

2.5.2.2 Panchimalco

The Puerta del Diablo Natural Park is located in Panchimalco a place renowned for preserving its indigenous traditions and strong cultural heritage. Although the park does not host its own festivities, it stands witness to the vibrant culture that surrounds it.

Intangible tourism resources are elements, such as the traditions, stories, and cultural practices that define a community. In this sense, the cultural heritage of Panchimalco is kept alive through its history, religious fervor, and textile tradition.

History and Origins of Panchimalco. Panchimalco is a town with a rich history that dates back to its founders, the descendants of the Toltecs. Panchimalco is a town with a rich history that dates back to its founders, the descendants of the Toltecs. The name Panchimalco is from Náhuat (Pantichimalku) and means "Place of Shields and Banners", derived from the words: Panti (flag), Chimal (shield), and Ku (place) (Hispanopedia, 2024a).

During the Spanish conquest, the area was nicknamed *El Fuerte* (The Fort) due to its concave terrain, which offered a defensive advantage to its inhabitants. Over time, the region became part of various administrative divisions. In 1770, it was part of the parish of San Jacinto; a few years later, it belonged to the parish of San Salvador. Between 1824 and 1836, it belonged to the department of San Salvador, and in a similar period, it was part of the Central American Federal District. Finally, in 1865, it was annexed to the district of Santo Tomás, and on February 7, 1879, the town obtained the title of *villa* by legislative decree (El Salvador mi país, 2013).

Panchimalco is a municipality recognized as a landmark of national culture, due to its predominantly pre-Columbian population. The place is full of history and architecture, and by walking along its cobblestone streets, one can discover the ancient beauty of its houses that still preserve their colonial roots. As a central part of its identity, Panchimalco is renowned for the

celebration of The Flowers and Palms, in honor of its patron saints, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin of the Rosary, making it the center of a significant religious festival (CORSATUR, 2022d).

Celebration and Syncretism. Before the colonial era, the indigenous people carried out rituals to celebrate the arrival of the rainy season, making offerings to their divinities such as "Our Lord the Flayed One." This tradition evolved into the "Festival of Flowers and Palms," celebrated annually in May. The festivity is a clear example of syncretism, the fusion of the Catholic religion with pre-Columbian customs. While the current celebration honors the Virgin, its original roots date back to these rites. The festival extends for a week, featuring various cultural activities such as traditional dances, the preparation and sale of typical food, sweets, and chicha, transforming Panchimalco into the center of a vibrant religious and cultural celebration (Centroamérica, 2025a).

The Festival of Flowers and Palms. Flowers, palms, and colors fill the streets of Panchimalco during the traditional Festival of Flowers and Palms, also known as the "Procession of Palms," which takes place on the first Sunday of May. The tradition, which honors the Virgin Mary and coincides with the start of the rainy season, attracts dozens of national and international visitors. Two local brotherhoods receive attendees, who decorate coconut palms with various flowers known as "stringing flowers." Afterward, everyone joins a solemn procession through the municipality's streets. The celebration includes traditional food and dances, reaffirming its status as one of the most important cultural and religious festivals in the region (Del Cid, 2023).

Figure 2.63

The Flowers and Palms Festival in Panchimalco



Note. Photograph reprinted from Castro (2022a).

The *Cofradías* (brotherhoods), led by the *capitana* and *mayordoma* (female captains), oversee preparations and of welcoming hundreds of visitors. Tradition dictates that at the homes of their representatives, tourists are given "pan picado" (minced bread) with coffee or chocolate, beef soup, and chicha. Preparations for the festival begin on Saturday night with the preparation of chicken tamales for distribution on Sunday.

On the day of the festivity, a series of rituals mark the event. The images of the Virgins are carried from the homes of the *capitana* and *mayordoma* to the church in a procession that leaves from these homes to culminate at the Santa Cruz Parish. Tourists witness a vibrant explosion of color, chants, and incense as inhabitants in indigenous attire parade, surrounded by palms laden with seasonal flowers. The *Historiantes* lead the procession, while amid the crowd, women in traditional dress carry the images of the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of the Rosary, and the Immaculate Conception. The festivity culminates in a solemn mass at the Santa Cruz Parish, where the people of Panchimalco display their rich cultural heritage (Orellana, 2024).

Figure 2.64

The Historinantes Performing during the Procession in Panchimalco



Note. Photograph reprinted from Castro (2022a).

Figure 2.65

Religious Procession of the Virgin Mary during the Flowers and Palms Festival



Note. Photograph reprinted from Castro (2022a).

In addition to the Festival of Flowers and Palms, the town of Panchimalco preserves other traditions. Its patron saint festivities take place in September in honor of the Holy Cross of Rome, and another festivity in May commemorates the Holy Cross of May. For these celebrations, the different neighborhoods of the town have their own brotherhoods, which

manage all the preparations. The *capitanas* (female captains) and mayordomos of the four brotherhoods organize the processions, provide food, and prepare the *ermitas* (chapels), where the figures of the Crucified Christ are located (Aquino, 2023).

The Role of the Historiantes

The *Historiantes* lead the procession's route, representing the historic fight between the Moors and the Christians. The procession, accompanied by Catholic followers and musicians, culminates in this ritual dance, which is a vivid depiction of the battle. In the choreography, the Christians triumph due to their Catholic faith. The percussionists initiate the combat; their different tunes mark the beginning and development of the battle, as without their music, the *Historiantes* cannot dance. The Moors wear helmets, while the Christians wear or carry a cross on their heads. This performance is another example of the region's cultural syncretism (Aquino, 2023).

Figure 2.66

The Historiantes during the Panchimalco Festival



Note. Photograph reprinted from Castro (2022a).

Tradition and legacy. Panchimalco is a municipality with a millennia-old productive vocation that has evolved to represent one of the main identity elements of El Salvador: the *Paño*

Pancho, made with the backstrap loom technique. In ancient Mesoamerica, weaving was an activity domain for women. Although the standing loom arrived in the 16th century, women continued to weave with the pre-Columbian backstrap loom (Redacción Equilibrium, 2017).

This instrument gets its name from the way the weaver adjusts it to her body: one end attaches to her waist, and the other to a tree or a fixed support. Through generations, the knowledge of this technique has been kept alive, and in recent years, young men have also learned to keep the tradition alive (Castro, 2024).

Figure 2.67

The Backstrap Loom Technique: Cultural Heritage of Panchimalco



Note. Photograph reprinted from Monge (2025). Original image rights held by AFP.

With the backstrap loom, weavers created traditional weavings with specific uses. The red-backed *pañó pancho* was worn by single women, while the black-backed one was for married women and also to accompany the deceased. Another traditional textile is the *nagüilla*, a skirt fabric woven with cotton thread only in red and black. The *manta pancho*, which is given as a wedding gift or used in funeral rituals, is made using the *pepenado* technique. Although Panchimalco women do not wear these traditional weavings in daily life, we can appreciate their cultural value in folklore dances, brotherhoods, and rituals during religious festivities, such as

Holy Week. Currently, weavers weave modern designs for clothing, purses, and other accessories with the ancestral backstrap loom technique (Castro, 2022b).

Figure 2.68

Panchimalco Women Wearing Traditional Manto Pancho During the Procession



Note. Photograph reprinted from Monge (2025). Original image rights held by AFP.

Figure 2.69

Traditional Paño Pancho Displayed During the Panchimalco Procession



Note. Photograph reprinted from Iraheta (2019).

Figure 2.70

Diversification of the Paño Pancho: New Products (Bags, Clothing) for the Modern Market



Note. Photograph reprinted from Iraheta (2019).

Origins and Identity of Traditional Attire. The traditional dresses of El Salvador, also known as national costumes, are garments that express the cultural identity of this Central American nation. These outfits are the result of a fusion of Spanish culture and that of the territory's original populations. During the colonial period, the Spanish imposed a specific dress on the natives, who habitually walked around semi-naked, giving rise to what we now call traditional dresses (Reyes, n.d.).

The traditional dress of the women of Panchimalco is the most representative of the central zone of El Salvador. Historically, the dress was not just clothing but a visual code that communicated a woman's status, made with local textiles.

Pancha de blanco Young single women wore a skirt of *nahuilla* with many yellow stripes, while older or married women wore the dress known as the Pancha de Negro (The Black Pancha). The skirt of the Pancha de Negro has red and yellow squares, with two large pleats and an immense *revuelo* (flounce). The skirt also includes embroidery on the hip, and a

white *justán* underneath. The blouse, made of satin fabric, was not worn in red to avoid matching the skirt.

On their heads, women wear a scarf called a *pañó* or *pancho*, woven on a backstrap loom. The *pañó* where red predominates is for single women, while the purple and black one is for older and married women. Additionally, as protectors, they wear a scapular on their chest along with a red coral necklace. To complement their outfit, they wear golden half-moon hoop earrings. Although less common in daily life, this dress is kept alive in dances and rituals as a reminder of the community's social customs.

The traditional clothing of Panchimalco women is also a clear example of the community's cultural identity and legacy. This traditional dress was not just an item of clothing but a visual code indicating a woman's status. Historically, young, single women wore light-colored details or a red background, while older or married women wore one with a black background (Iraheta, 2022). This tradition, though less common in daily life, is kept alive as a reminder of the community's social customs.

Figure 2.71

Pancha de Blanco Traditional Attire: Cultural Costume of Panchimalco



Note. Photograph reprinted from Iraheta (2022).

Figure 2.72

Pancha de Negro Traditional Attire: Cultural Costume of Panchimalco



Note. Photograph reprinted from Iraheta (2022).

2.5.3 Cerro Verde Natural Park

Cerro Verde Natural Park is a place of majestic beauty. It commands breathtaking panoramic views of the serene Lake Coatepeque and the imposing Izalco volcano and Santa Ana volcano. However, beyond its trails and landscapes, the park holds a valuable treasure: its intangible heritage. This living legacy is in the stories, legends, and traditions that have given the place its soul. From the tales that explain their origin to the festivities that celebrate its fruits, the authentic charm of Cerro Verde comes alive in every story and tradition.

History of Cerro Verde Natural Park

Cerro Verde Natural Park, located in the department of Santa Ana, 77 kilometers from San Salvador, was inaugurated and opened to the public in 1955 by its founder, Raúl Contreras. The land was originally a private estate dedicated to coffee cultivation. However, the Salvadoran government acquired it in the early 1950s, since it wanted to protect the area's biodiversity. Thanks to this initiative, Cerro Verde became part of the Los Volcanoes Complex, establishing itself as a priority area for environmental conservation in El Salvador (ISTU, 2025b; Pazzita, 2025).

The Jocote Corona Fair

Every year, on a weekend in October, the Cerro Verde Natural Park is transformed into an authentic feast of flavor with the celebration of the Jocote Corona Fair. With the Jocote Corona Fair, Cerro Verde Natural Park holds a central place at the heart of Salvadoran tradition and tourism. This event is not only an opportunity for tourists to enjoy the region's gastronomic richness, but it also promotes agritourism and directly benefits local communities, producers, and micro-entrepreneurs. Tourists enjoy a complete experience, buying fresh jocotes from local farms and tasting a wide variety of preparations, including ice cream, wines, snacks, traditional

sweets, and cold drinks, all created by local entrepreneurs who demonstrate the versatility of this fruit. To complement the festivities, an artistic program features live music, and an inflatable play area for children (Monge, 2024; Puente, 2025).

The star of the festival, the jocote corona, is a fruit typical of the highlands of western El Salvador. It is distinguished from other varieties by its taste, a delicious combination of sweet and sour, and by its name, which comes from the protuberances at one of its ends, giving it a crown-like shape. The festival offers a unique opportunity to try it innovative and less traditional preparations such as atol, juices, ice creams, wines, pupusas, pizza, and desserts. With a cultural agenda of music, handicrafts, and hikes, the fair is one of the most anticipated festivals of the year, where gastronomy, culture, tradition, and nature combine to celebrate a fundamental part of El Salvador's identity (Monge, 2024; Puente, 2025).

Figure 2.73

Jocote Corona: Display of the Main Fruit at the Cerro Verde Fair



Note. Photograph reprinted from Puente (2025).

Figure 2.74

Diversification of Local Gastronomy: Beverages Made from the Jocote Fruit



Note. Photograph reprinted from Puente (2025).

The Legends of Cerro Verde National Park

Beyond historical milestones and annual celebrations, Cerro Verde's identity is fueled by a deeper element: oral tradition. The mountains, volcanoes, and forests are not only a natural setting but also the backdrop for a rich collection of legends and myths safeguarded by the local communities. These narratives imbue the landscape with a mystical and emotional significance, transforming every trail into part of a story and enriching the destination with an intangible tourism resource that powerfully appeals to the traveler's imagination.

The Woman in White

Many years ago, during a time when Cerro Verde was perpetually shrouded in mist and was barely visited, a story circulated among farmers and travelers. They spoke of a woman who appeared on the trails, dressed in white, with a cloak that seemed to glow under the moonlight. They said her face was serene and beautiful, but her eyes reflected a deep sadness. She was seen at dusk, just as the sun was setting behind the Izalco and Ilamatepec (Santa Ana) volcanoes.

One afternoon, a young man named Ernesto went up the hill to look for firewood. Suddenly, the mist enveloped him, and he realized he was lost. The silence was so dense that even the crickets seemed to have hidden. It was then that he saw a white silhouette moving softly among the trees. "Are you lost?" the woman asked him in a sweet voice. Ernesto nodded without a second thought. She smiled at him and pointed to a barely visible path. "Follow this path, and you will arrive safely," she said. The young man obeyed, and within minutes, he was in a clearing that was familiar to him. When he turned to thank her, the woman was gone.

Ernesto returned to the village and told them what had happened. The elders revealed that it was not the first time this woman had appeared, as she had already manifested to other lost travelers to guide them back. According to the legend, she was a peasant woman who died while searching for her son on the hill when the volcano was roaring and the earth was shaking. Because she never found him, her spirit ceaselessly wanders, helping those who get lost so that no one else suffers what she suffered. However, the locals warn that if someone mocks her or tries to follow her with bad intentions, the woman vanishes, and the mist becomes so thick that the person walks in circles until they lose their mind. Today, guides and tourists claim that during hikes on Cerro Verde, they feel as if someone is watching them. When the wind blows hard through the trees, a soft murmur echoes, the eternal call of a mother for her son (Tierra de Nostalgia, 2025; English translation by the authors).

The Hotel and the Lighthouse of the Pacific

One of the most fascinating stories of the place revolves around the Cerro Verde Hotel. The construction of this imposing building started in 1956, with a singular goal: to grant its guests an unparalleled view of the Izalco volcano, renowned for its frequent eruptions that made it visible for miles and earned it the nickname "The Lighthouse of the Pacific."

However, just a few days before the hotel's inauguration on November 19, 1958, the volcano, which had been active for about 50 years, abruptly stopped erupting. Its sudden silence gave rise to two theories: some believe it was a simple coincidence, while the more superstitious think that the hotel's construction, built to observe the volcano, broke its cycle and was a kind of curse. Despite the irony, the hotel was inaugurated and operated without problems, turning the story into one of the most famous legends of the place (Herrera, n.d.; English translation by the authors).

2.5.4 Los Tercios Waterfall

Beyond its singular geological beauty, the Los Tercios Waterfall is a place laden with history and mystery. While its main attractions are its unique rock formations, the genuine intangible value of this site lies in the legends and in the stories that explain the origin of its name, elements that reflect the collective memory of the Salvadoran people.

The Los Tercios Waterfall is named for the stream on which it sits, known as the quebrada Las Ánimas (The Souls Creek). According to locals, the creek bears that name in memory of the people who lost their lives during the country's civil conflict. Meanwhile, the waterfall is called "Los Tercios" (The Thirds) because of the unique shape of its basalt rocks, which resemble vertically stacked tree trunks. In Salvadoran tradition, bundles of firewood known as "tercios" lent their name to the waterfall (CoolTour, 2022).

2.5.4.1 Legends of the Los Tercios Waterfall

Despite its striking physical appearance, the draw of Los Tercios also lies in its intangible heritage. The powerful symbolism of the tercios is not the only narrative associated with the waterfall; the site is also the nucleus of two distinct oral traditions that enrich its cultural value and deepen its mystery for visitors.

The Impossible Love and Curse

This legend explains the origin of the Los Tercios Waterfall's peculiar rocks, which look mysteriously carved and stacked. According to the story, preserved by locals, it begins with a failed love between the daughter of a wealthy family and a young indigenous man. Opposing the relationship, the girl's parents made the young man's life miserable, separating them (Peña, 2021a; English translation by the authors).

The indigenous man's father, seeing his son's suffering, cast a curse on the girl's family, who owned a textile warehouse. The curse caused their rolls of fabric to instantly turn into stone, petrifying the business and causing the family to lose everything. Since then, the peculiar rock formations of the waterfall, which resemble stacked fabric rolls, have been a petrified reminder of an impossible love and the curse that separated them (Peña, 2021a; English translation by the authors).

Figure 2.75

The Impossible Love and The Curse



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "A wealthy colonial woman and an indigenous man in a forbidden love, with rolls of textile fabric turning to stone in the background, illustrating the curse at Los Tercios Waterfall" (2025, September 05).

La Pescadita de oro (The Little Golden Fish)

This legend adds a touch of magic and mysticism to the place. The legend claims that in the depths of the waterfall's pool, a "little golden fish" resides. Every winter, the waterfall comes to life thanks to the fish, but no one can see it. Legend warns that whoever manages to see it does not live to tell the tale or ends up losing their sanity (Orellana, 2017; English translation by the authors).

While the Los Tercios Waterfall offers a valuable glimpse into local history and legends, its intangible resources are limited to its name and myths. To thoroughly explore the region's rich

cultural heritage, it is essential to get to know Suchitoto. This charming town, close to the waterfall, is a true epicenter of culture and the arts, and a landmark in the preservation of Salvadoran traditions.

Figure 2.76

The Little Golden Fish: Mystical Source of Life for Los Tercios Waterfall



Note. Image created by A. Baiza using Gemini with the prompt, "A beautiful, mystical golden fish swimming in the deep, clear waters of a hidden pool at the base of a powerful waterfall, implying the fish is the source of the waterfall's water, with lush, slightly overgrown vegetation around the pool, no human figures, in a magical, ethereal style" (2025, September 05).

2.5.4.2 A Living Cultural Legacy

While the Los Tercios Waterfall offers a valuable glimpse into local history and legends, its intangible resources are limited to its name and myths. To thoroughly explore the region's rich cultural heritage, it is essential to get to know Suchitoto. This charming town, close to the waterfall, is a true epicenter of culture and the arts, and a landmark in the preservation of Salvadoran traditions.

Just over an hour from the capital, in the department of Cuscatlán, lies Suchitoto, a picturesque place that captivates both local and foreign tourists with its beauty. Known as the "Place of the Flower Bird," the town is famous for its impressive combination of pre-Columbian origins, rich colonial architecture, vibrant history, and immense natural wealth (Puente, 2024).

Suchitoto boasts a rich history, originating as an indigenous village before the Spanish colonists established the first European settlement on Mesoamerican soil there in 1525 (Museo Alejandro Cotto, n.d.; "Suchitoto," n.d.). The city's name is derived from the Nahuatl toponym "Suchitutum," meaning Bird and Flower (Peña, 2021b). The ruins of that original foundation, known as Ciudad Vieja, are preserved today as an exceptional archaeological park located 6 kilometers from the current city ("Suchitoto," n.d.).

The Suchitoto of today is a testament to its development since the late colonial era, preserving a rich architectural and cultural heritage. Its beauty, defined by mansions, ornate façades, cobblestone streets, plazas, and the iconic Alejandro Cotto Theater and Santa Lucía Church, offers an impressive level of authenticity that transports visitors to its colonial past ("Suchitoto," n.d.). However, the city's history includes a period of severe adversity. During the armed conflict, the city was severely affected, and many of its inhabitants emigrated. Due to its resilience and tragic past, Suchitoto is also known as the "Martyr City" (Museo Alejandro Cotto, n.d.).

2.5.4.3 Suchitoto's Celebrations and Festivals

The Day of the Cross

The Day of the Cross, celebrated every May 3rd, is a Catholic tradition that persists in El Salvador and coincides with the beginning of the rainy season. Salvadorans place a cross made from the native jiote tree in their yards or gardens, decorating it with streamers, hangings, and

seasonal fruits like mangoes, jocotes, and watermelons. They make this offering to the cross to bless the harvests and ensure prosperity (Cañenguez, 2022).

The ritual has deep roots in syncretism. The tradition arrived in America with the Spanish and simultaneously coincided with indigenous celebrations dedicated to the god Xipe Totec, to whom indigenous people made offerings at the start of winter to ensure fertile land. Although the Spanish imposed the Christian cross, the Indigenous people adopted the native jiote tree for their crosses. They selected the jiote tree since it possesses the remarkable ability to survive severe cuts and regrow in any soil, traits that symbolize the resilience and life cycle celebrated in their original deity. In this way, the indigenous people silently passed on their worship, fusing their ancestral beliefs with the Catholic ritual of the cross (Cañenguez, 2022).

Figure 2.77

The Festival of Altares de la Cruz in Suchitoto



Note. Photograph reprinted from Gaceta Suchitoto (2025).

The Day of the Cross, a household tradition in the rest of the country, has been transformed into a cultural festival, the Cross Altars in Suchitoto. For more than 16 years, the municipality's inhabitants have decorated courtyards, balconies, and gardens with colorful and

creative altars for tourists to appreciate. Cultural promoter Elmer Martínez initiated this festival, supported by institutions such as the House of Culture and the Municipal Mayor's Office, to transform the tradition into a tourist attraction (Orellana, 2022). In addition to fruits and decorations, the unmissable *dulce gallito*, which are candies of *melcocha*, a form of pulled sugar-cane taffy, shaped like little roosters. That originates in the town of San Luis Aguacayo, and has become an essential element of the tradition in the altars (Cañenguez, 2021).

Figure 2.78

Dulce Gallito: Essential Sweet for the Day of the Cross Altars in Suchitoto



Note. Photograph reprinted from Cañenguez (2022).

Figure 2.79

Dulce Gallito: A Cherished Traditional Sweet of Suchitoto



Note. Photograph reprinted from Cañenguez (2022).

The festival is typically held on the weekend close to May 3rd to ensure maximum public attendance, as the specific date does not always fall on a weekend. This adaptation enables tourists to learn about the community's history and creativity. It provides local artisans and merchants with the opportunity to sell their products, integrating the cultural heritage with the town's economic vitality (Orellana, 2022).

Figure 2.80

Cross at the Altar of the Cross Festival: Colorful and Beautifully Decorated



Note. Photograph reprinted from Gaceta Suchitoto (2025).

Suchitoto's "Blue Gold" Festival: A Celebration of Indigo

The Indigo Festival is a celebration that highlights the heritage of this natural pigment known as "blue gold," which has held great economic importance to the country since pre-Columbian times (Gaceta Suchitoto, 2024). Its production was a symbol of wealth and status, and for this reason, September 6th of each year is celebrated as National Indigo Day by

legislative decree (CORSATUR, 2022a). Although industrialization and synthetic dyes diminished their relevance, today the festival seeks to revitalize this legacy as a symbol of community resilience and pride (Gaceta Suchitoto, 2024).

This spirit of revitalization is manifest in the vibrant annual festival, an event that attracts visitors from all over with its numerous activities. One of the most outstanding attractions is the launching of indigo-dyed curtains at Santa Lucía Church, a visual spectacle that contrasts with the colonial architecture. The festivity includes dyeing workshops, talks at the Alejandro Cotto Theater, art exhibitions, music, and dance. Artisans showcase their skills in crafting dyed products, even presenting them in a fashion show (CORSATUR, 2022a). In addition, the festival transforms the entire town. Visitors can enjoy rides on a tourist road train adorned with indigo details that travels the cobblestone streets, as well as boat rides on Lake Suchitlán, where the boats also have decorative indigo touches. Local restaurants join the celebration with indigo-toned decorations, making this festival a sensory experience that connects visitors with the past and present of "blue gold" (CORSATUR, 2022a).

2.5.5 The Intangible Heritage of Lake Güija

Lake Güija, is one of the most mysterious lakes in El Salvador, is a majestic body of water that stretches across the border with Guatemala. Known for its rich biodiversity, ancient ruins, and mysterious islands, this area transcends being merely an ecotourism hub. Beneath its waters and along its shores, the lake holds a vast intangible heritage and legacy of stories, myths, and legends that have been passed down from generation to generation. From ancient indigenous tales about its islands to mysterious colonial legends, the lake has been the stage for countless narratives that have given it a soul of its own. To truly understand the magic of Güija, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the stories that give it life.

The Origin and Legends of Lake Güija

The official name of the lake, Güija, has its roots in a rich fusion of ancient languages. The local Chortí people called it Güija, which in the Apay language means "water surrounded by hills" (from güi, huit' = hill; and ja = water) (Lardé y Larín, 1978). At the same time, the Pipil people knew it as "Lake Huitzia," which translates to "place where thorns abound." The Spanish colonizers, unable to pronounce the original words, adapted the name to the form we know today (PREPAC et al., n.d.).

But the origin of the lake is just as fascinating as its name. The formation of this body of water was the result of a powerful natural event, according to the morphogenesis of the area, a lava flow originating from the volcanic activity of the San Diego, Vega de la Caña, and Masatepeque hills. This current of molten rock flowed until it obstructed the natural course of the Ostúa and Angue rivers. This blockage completely closed off the valley's drainage, causing water to accumulate and, consequently, form the large lake. (PREPAC et al., n.d.).

The Legends of Lake Güija

The Submerged City

The origin of the lake is as mysterious as its name, giving rise to legends that persist over time. The original story, according to the locals, tells that many years ago, a prosperous indigenous city existed in that very valley, known as Güijat. Life in the city ended abruptly one day when the San Diego volcano erupted. A massive lava flow descended, obstructing the course of the Ostúa River and diverting its flow. The river's water began to fill the entire valley, flooding the city. Although there is no information on whether its inhabitants managed to escape, the tales of the fishermen remain alive, who claim to have seen remnants of the settlement in the depths of the lake (Nipolan, 2022; English translation by the authors).

Over the years, through oral transmission, the legend was transformed. More recent stories, propagated among the inhabitants, incorporate a fascinating element of cultural syncretism. Local accounts state that the indigenous city supposedly possessed a church with saints and virgins, as well as treasures such as silver and gold objects, and lamps. However, historical records confirm that the lake already existed before the arrival of the Spanish. Therefore, the submerged city in the lake couldn't possibly have had a church, since churches, virgins, and saints were by the Spanish (Lardé y Larín, 1978). This second version of the legend is proof of how the beliefs and narratives of one culture blended with the original story, creating a new tale that is part of the intangible heritage of the place.

The Legend of the Virgin of Taxis

One of the most mystical legends of Lake Güija is that of the Virgin of Taxis. The story goes that on certain nights under the glow of the full moon, the Virgin Mary, who was in the submerged city's church, emerges from the depths of the water. Her serene figure glides across the lake's surface as if she has risen from the ancient settlement to bathe in its waters before disappearing back into the quiet of the night (Nipolan, 2022; English translation by the authors).

The Night Lights of the Submerged City

Another legend, which fuels the mystery of the city of Güijat, is that of the night lights. Some fishermen report seeing that in the stillness of the night, it is still possible to see the submerged city beneath the lake's tranquil waters. Locals and fishermen tell of seeing lights that emanate from the depths, as if the life of the ancient settlement still shines from its watery bed. These phantom glimmers are, for many, a reminder that the city is not dead, but merely sleeps under the water (El Salvador mi país, 2024; English translation by the authors).

The Legend of the Giant Serpent

The fishermen of Lake Gūija tell one of the oldest legends of the place: in the deepest part of the lake, there is an enormous stone temple, and in it lives a gigantic serpent. According to the tale, a powerful god sent this creature with the mission to destroy an ancient village. Today, the temple lies submerged in the waters, buried by time and guarded by the serpent. The story goes that in the ruins of this temple; there lies an immense treasure. However, no one dares to look for it, as the legend warns that whoever tries to go to the bottom of the lake and look for the treasure will inevitably drown, as the serpent protects the treasure and punishes those who dare to desecrate the lakebed (Molina et al., n.d.; English translation by the authors).

These legends are not just tales of a distant past; they reflect the soul of Lake Gūija. From the mystical submerged city, with its phantom lights that still shine at night, to the protective Virgin of Taxis and the serpent that guards its treasure, each story is a thread that weaves the rich intangible heritage of the place. These tales demonstrate that, beyond the beauty of its waters, the lake lives through the imagination and tradition of its people, turning it into a treasure of myths and wonders.

2.6 The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Tourism

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or Global Goals, are a collection of 17 interconnected objectives designed to serve as a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future." Adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, they are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2018; UNDP, n.d.; WHO, n.d.). These goals are not merely targets but a universal call to action to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce

inequality, and spur economic growth, all while addressing climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (UNASDG, n.d.).

The following section will detail each of the 17 goals, highlighting their individual importance and their collective role in creating a more just and sustainable world (Sharma, 2025; United Nations, n.d.-c).

Figure 2.81

The Set of 17 SDG Icons: Framework for Sustainable Tourism



Note. Design adapted using Canva.

1. **No Poverty.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. **Zero Hunger.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. **Good Health and Well-being.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

4. **Quality Education.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. **Gender Equality.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. **Clean Water and Sanitation.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. **Affordable and Clean Energy.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth.** Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
9. **Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
10. **Reduced Inequalities.** Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
12. **Responsible Consumption and Production.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. **Climate Action.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14. **Life Below Water.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. **Life on Land.** Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

16. **Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

17. **Partnerships for the Goals.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

2.7 Strategic Plans

This section outlines the essential Strategic Plans for Echo Journeys. Our central objective is to be the leading provider of high-quality, accessible nature experiences for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. We achieve this by offering inclusive hiking and nature trails in protected forest areas, Echo Journeys' strategy has two core pillars that drive our success:

Action Plan: This pillar details the operational actions and defines roles to ensure smooth execution, along with the improvements (promotions and special offers) we will implement to enhance our service and appeal.

Quality Management and Customer Service: This pillar focuses on ensuring service excellence and building lasting relationships by transforming high standards of quality into customer loyalty. These plans aim to transform our objective of inclusive tourism into a reliable, satisfying, and high-quality journey for every client.

Table 2.1

Strategic Action Plan for Echo Journeys

ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	IMPROVEMENTS
<p>Ensure Accessible and Inclusive Customer Communication.</p> <p>To provide a welcoming experience for all travelers, we will implement an ongoing training program in Salvadorean Sign Language (LESSA) and raise awareness about Deaf and hard-of-hearing culture. This will include regular courses and practical workshops for tour guides, customer service staff, and other employees who interact directly with travelers. This ensures communication is fluid, respectful, and inclusive.</p>	<p>Position: Customer Service Manager Ana Cecilia Baiza</p> <p>This role involves designing, implementing, and supervising the LESSA and Deaf culture training program for all staff. This includes identifying qualified instructors, coordinating course and workshop schedules, and continuously evaluating staff progress to ensure they acquire the necessary skills for fluid and respectful communication. They will also ensure the daily application of these skills in all customer interactions.</p>	<p>Group Discount for Day Tours</p> <p>Enjoy a 15% discount on the total price of your reservation for any of our day tours when booking for groups of 5 or more people. This promotion encourages larger group bookings, making our tours more appealing for families, friends, or small corporate groups.</p>
<p>Agile and Personalized Inquiry Management (Customer Service)</p> <p>Implement a system to respond quickly and efficiently to all customer inquiries, whether through email, social media, WhatsApp, or video calls with an interpreter. This involves having trained staff available to handle frequent questions, request specific information, and offer personalized solutions. Special attention will be given to the necessary adaptations for communication with Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals (for example, video responses in LESSA and using clear, concise text).</p>	<p>Position: Customer Service Manager Ana Cecilia Baiza</p> <p>This person is responsible for designing and implementing protocols for accessible communication across all channels, including email, social media, WhatsApp, and video calls with an interpreter. She will supervise the team to ensure responses are prompt and efficient, while also managing client inquiry data for comprehensive service. Her duties include ensuring the application of specific adaptations for Deaf and hard-of-hearing clients, such as video responses in LESSA or clear text.</p>	<p>Welcome Kit for Long-Stay International Travelers</p> <p>We'll offer an exclusive welcome kit (including a canvas tote bag, t-shirt, hat, or water bottle with designs of El Salvador and our brand) to every member of international groups of 10 or more people who book a trip of at least 5 days. This provides a tangible souvenir and builds brand loyalty with high-value customers.</p>

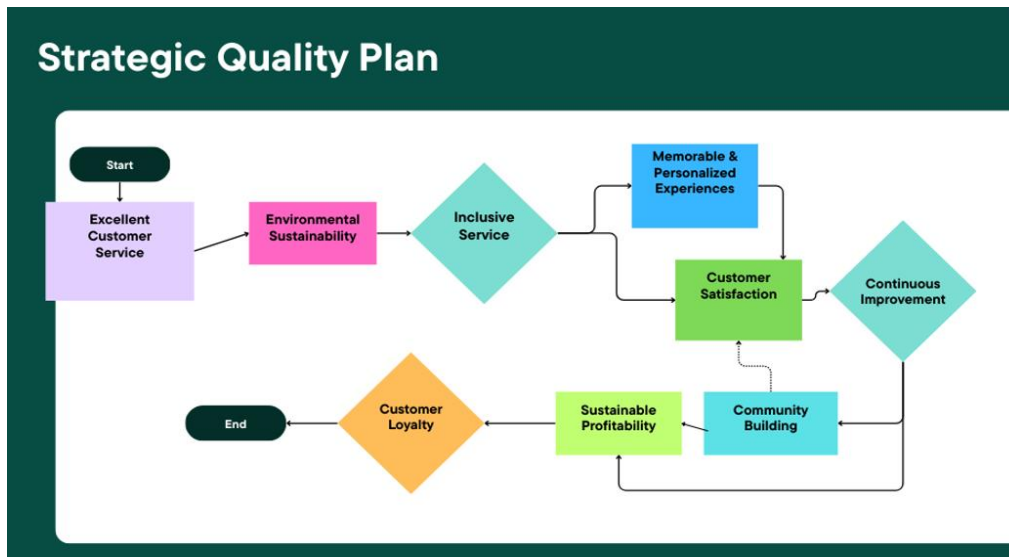
<p>Inclusive Digital Marketing Strategy</p> <p>Develop and execute a digital marketing strategy on social media and other digital channels that is accessible and encourages participation from the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. This involves creating visually appealing content, videos with LESSA interpreters and captions, testimonials from Deaf customers, and using relevant community hashtags. It also includes active engagement in online groups and communities related to accessible tourism and Deaf culture.</p>	<p>Position : Digital Marketing Specialist Gabriela Lourdes Pérez</p> <p>This person is responsible for designing and executing the digital marketing strategy on social media and other channels. She will ensure it is accessible and encourages participation from the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. She will create visually appealing content, including videos with LESSA interpreters and captions, and manage active engagement in relevant online groups and communities to attract and retain this customer segment.</p>	<p>Welcome Package for Full-Payment Day Tour Bookings</p> <p>The first 20 people (individual slots) who choose to pay 100% of the cost of a day tour at the time of booking will receive a special welcome package for their hike. This benefit, given to each participant who meets the conditions, includes a one-liter water bottle and two energy snacks. This incentive encourages immediate full payments, improving cash flow.</p>
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ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	IMPROVEMENTS
<p>Prospective Client Follow-Up</p> <p>Establish a protocol for following up with individuals who have shown interest in tour packages, requested information, or indicated a future decision but have not yet confirmed their booking. This can include personalized emails, WhatsApp messages (with the option of video calls for LESSA), or even follow-up calls (if the client prefers and with an interpreter's support if necessary). The goal is to provide additional information, resolve pending questions, or present special offers.</p>	<p>Position: Sales and Client Follow-Up Manager</p> <p>Gabriela Lourdes Pérez</p> <p>The Sales and Client Follow-Up Manager is responsible for establishing and executing the follow-up protocol for clients who have shown interest but have not confirmed their booking. She will manage personalized communication through emails, WhatsApp messages (including the option for video calls in LESSA), and, if necessary, follow-up calls with interpreter support. Her role is to resolve outstanding questions, offer additional information, or present special offers to convert interest into a sale and foster long-term relationships.</p>	<p>Student Discount</p> <p>We offer a special discount for active students who present a valid student ID. They will receive a 10% discount on the purchase of day tours and a 15% discount on the acquisition of tour packages of two days or more. This taps into the student travel market, a key demographic for our type of tourism.</p>

Note. Adapted and developed by the author based on the strategic analysis of the Echo Journeys tour operator.

Figure 2.82

Conceptual Map of the Quality Strategy Plan for Echo Journeys



Note. Adapted and developed by the author based on the quality principles established for Echo Journeys.

This Strategic Quality Plan outlines Echo Journeys' commitment to excellence and inclusion. It is a structured process where each action and commitment leads to the next stage, building a value chain that ensures quality, customer satisfaction, and company sustainability. These are the primary key factors for our tour operator's sustainability and growth. This process is visually represented in the Conceptual Map and detailed through the following nine steps, which transform quality control into lasting customer loyalty and advocacy.

Step 1: Excellent Customer Service

Excellent Customer Service is the cornerstone of our company, focused on consistently exceeding client expectations at every point of contact. It goes beyond simply providing information; it means anticipating needs, offering proactive solutions, and ensuring that every interaction is with empathy and respect. For Echo Journeys, this is about providing fully

accessible communication, understanding the unique needs of our community, and building a foundation of trust and reliability.

Expected Outcome. To establish a strong reputation as a leader in inclusive and accessible travel, resulting in a positive brand image and a solid base of loyal clients who confidently rely on our service.

Step 2: Environmental Sustainability

This step is a core business value focused on minimizing our environmental impact and preserving the natural beauty of El Salvador. Our actions demonstrate our commitment to sustainability. We implement a strict zero-waste policy during all tours, supporting local conservation projects through partnerships and educating our clients on responsible travel. We ensure that our presence has a positive effect on the ecosystems and communities we visit.

Expected Outcome. To establish Echo Journeys as a leader in ethical ecotourism, building a reputation of trust and responsibility that attracts environmentally conscious clients and contributes to the long-term preservation of our natural heritage.

Step 3: Inclusive Service

The priority of Echo Journeys is to offer high-quality service and experiences that eliminate communication barriers and ensure the comfort and safety of every client. To achieve this, we continuously invest in staff training in LESSA and Deaf culture, design accessible itineraries, and utilize agile, personalized communication channels (such as video calls in LESSA and written chats) to respond to the unique needs of our community.

Expected Outcome. To establish a foundational service that not only eliminates communication and safety barriers but also fully addresses the unique needs of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, thereby guaranteeing client comfort and safety.

Step 4: Memorable & Personalized Experiences

This step focuses on creating experiences that forge a deep emotional connection with the brand. The goal is to ensure clients feel understood, respected, and valued in every interaction, making the trip a personal story of freedom, belonging, and well-being. To achieve this, we focus on individualized treatment, fostering friendships to generate a sense of community, and prioritizing an environment that promotes independence and autonomy in our clients.

Expected Outcome. To build a strong emotional connection with clients, positioning Echo Journeys as more than a tour, but as a trusted space for self-discovery and belonging.

Step 5: Customer Satisfaction

This step focuses on actively measuring and managing customer satisfaction to ensure our services consistently meet the needs of the community. It is achieved by actively gathering feedback through accessible surveys and personalized post-tour conversations. We strive to provide clients with the feeling that their opinions are valued and that their voices directly influence the continuous improvement of our service.

Expected Outcome. Clients who consistently report positive experiences and feel that Echo Journey meets their needs proactively. It will directly contribute to our continuous improvement process, raising the level of satisfaction to an even higher point.

Step 6: Continuous Improvement

This step focuses on using the data and insights gathered from customer feedback to refine and enhance our services and operations. We will systematically analyze all feedback, from surveys to social media comments, to identify areas for improvement and implement agile changes. Ensuring our company remains at the forefront of quality and innovation, consistently adapting to meet and exceed our community's evolving needs.

Expected Outcome. To establish a dynamic and responsive system of constant improvement, resulting in an enhanced quality of service and an increase in our ability to meet the community's future needs and expectations.

Step 7: Community Building

Our strategy is to leverage the power of word-of-mouth marketing from our satisfied and loyal clients. Building a strong sense of community, security, and trust, we will actively encourage positive reviews and give our clients a platform on our social media channels to share their experiences within the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Expected Outcome. A steady influx of new clients through community referrals which will reduce the need for investment in advertising.

Step 8: Sustainable Profitability

Sustainable Profitability is the direct financial outcome of our strategic quality plan. Investing in inclusive services and memorable experiences, Echo Journeys builds loyalty and a strong community. Reduces our advertising costs and makes a constant influx of new clients through referrals. This step demonstrates that excellence and inclusion are the most effective drivers of long-term financial growth and stability.

Expected Outcome. To achieve long-term financial health and business viability, ensuring the company can continue to invest in quality and expansion, thereby securing a strong position in the market.

Step 9: Customer Loyalty

The goal of this step is to leverage client trust and satisfaction to cultivate long-term loyalty. We will achieve this by implementing a loyalty program with exclusive benefits (such as discounts and event invitations) and proactive follow-up with clients. Our team will maintain

personal contact and offer new experiences to encourage repeat business and strengthen their connection with the brand.

Expected Outcome. To significantly increase the rate of repeat clients who have a strong identification with the Echo Journeys brand, thereby establishing a base of lifelong, recurring customers.

CHAPTER III

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A TOURIST PRODUCT OR SERVICE

3.1 Entrepreneurial Responsibility

This chapter addresses the conception and operational structure of Echo Journeys from the perspective of Entrepreneurial Responsibility. In the context of accessible tourism, this responsibility, which transcends mere profitability, is defined by ethical commitment to eliminate the communication and safety barriers that have excluded the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The central objective is to demonstrate how social sensitivity becomes the engine of the commercial strategy and the major brand differentiator.

This framework presents its development in three principal sections:

The Entrepreneur. This section defines the leadership profile and business philosophy, detailing the project's Entrepreneurship, its Importance of Entrepreneurship, the Profile of the Entrepreneur, the Cycle of Entrepreneurship, and the consolidated Echo Journeys Entrepreneurship Profile.

Market Niche. This section presents the analysis of the tourism niche for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Examining the critical barriers that Echo Journeys resolves justify the business viability, such as functional illiteracy and insecurity regarding sound alerts, making accessibility the core value.

Corporate Strategy: Echo Journeys. The Corporate Strategy section defines the corporate identity, projecting the philosophy of Entrepreneurial Responsibility onto the brand. This section covers the development of the Logo and Slogan, as well as the definition of the Mission, Vision, and Values that will guide the tour operator's ethical and strategic operation.

3.1.1 The Entrepreneur

This section establishes the ethical framework and the leadership vision that sustain Echo Journeys, analyzing how social responsibility becomes the driving force behind the commercial and operational strategy.

Entrepreneurship

The Entrepreneurship of Echo Journeys is a social innovation within the tourism sector, since communication barriers are a crucial ethical and market failure in traditional tourism for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The primary objective of Echo Journeys is to transform the right to leisure into a functional reality, utilizing Sign Language and Universal Design as its principal business tool.

Importance of Entrepreneurship

The importance of this project transcends the purely economic, establishing a model of Entrepreneurial Responsibility with impact on:

Social Inclusion. It guarantees equal opportunities, promotes the visibility of Deaf culture, and combats social isolation by offering experiences where communication is accessible and complete.

Environmental and Cultural Stewardship. Echo Journeys actively seeks to highlight and promote the protected areas and natural reserves of El Salvador in its itineraries. Through these guided tours, the company aims to instill in travelers the importance of nature conservation and ecological awareness, linking the act of exploration to a responsible appreciation of the country's biodiversity.

Market Value. It opens and capitalizes on a neglected market niche (accessible tourism), demonstrating that accessibility is profitable.

Sectoral Leadership. It contributes to the improvement of the destination by generating demand for accessible infrastructure (visual alarms, Hearing Loops) and qualified personnel (Sign Language guides), thereby raising the standards of safety and quality for the general tourism service.

The Profile of an Entrepreneur

The profile of the entrepreneur leading Echo Journeys requires a high degree of functional sensitivity, defined by professional listening. It is necessary to differentiate genuine needs from prejudices or superficial solutions. The essential qualities are:

Sense of Opportunity. Responsibility against Exclusion: The leader identified that the market's unmet need is the linguistic barrier. It stems from the fact that a large portion of the Deaf community relies on Sign Language and has functional difficulty accessing or comprehending information presented only in spoken or written language (which affects up to 70% of the population). The opportunity, therefore, lies in addressing this communication gap, not merely the lack of physical adaptations (such as ramps).

Vision and Passion. Echo Journeys has a clear vision driven by an intense passion for the Deaf community. This passion translates into the raw energy and determination needed to overcome market resistance, uphold rigorous accessibility protocols, and, crucially, sustain the financial risk and resilience inherent in pioneering a new, ethically demanding market segment.

Creativity and Innovation. Innovation is applied across all facets of Echo Journeys to ensure a barrier-free experience. Creativity is not only to integrate TICs (Chat, Video Telephony) and visual protocols that respond to the Deaf user's logic, but also to:

Design Itineraries and Routes: Creativity drives the selection and development of safe, adaptable routes that maximize visual engagement while minimizing noise-induced fatigue.

Develop Activities: Innovation focuses on transforming traditional activities into visually engaging and fully communicable experiences (e.g., using real-time typing for cultural lectures).

Marketing and Promotion: Creative strategies are applied to marketing to ensure advertising is inherently accessible, utilizing Sign Language content and high-contrast visual standards to reach the target community directly.

Capacity for Learning. The entrepreneurial commitment to learning is dual and continuous, ensuring both ethical service and operational resilience.

Inclusive Learning: Learning constantly about Deaf and hard-of-hearing cultures and communities, their specific communication modalities, and the various assistive technologies (Hearing Loops, FM systems, CIs) they utilize. This deep understanding ensures the service is not arbitrary or based on outdated notions of "normality."

Operational Learning: The capacity to learn is equally vital for business resilience. It includes constantly analyzing operational failures and financial performance, adapting to changes in regulations, optimizing routes and itineraries, and enhancing personnel management. This commitment to learning from mistakes ensures the longevity and continuous improvement of Echo Journeys' quality and service delivery.

Teamwork. It is a shared responsibility that extends beyond the internal staff to encompass the entire travel ecosystem.

The team prioritizes the labor inclusion of Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to ensure the coherence and authenticity of the service, recognizing their unique communication expertise as a competitive advantage. Furthermore, this collaborative effort extends to the broader community, actively engaging families and travel companions of Deaf and hard-of-hearing

clients as vital stakeholders in the service delivery process. This broad collaboration ensures that the experience is co-created with, and truly reflects the needs of, the entire target market.

Cycle of Entrepreneurship

The Echo Journeys entrepreneurship cycle is conceived within the framework of Entrepreneurial Responsibility, ensuring that commercial development integrates the validation of functional accessibility and the safety of the Deaf traveler.

1. The Business Idea Identification.

Inclusion Imperative. The idea emerges from the responsibility to solve the communication barrier that excludes 70% of the Deaf population. Sign Language is a core operational pillar.

2. The Business Mode.

Accessibility Design and Protocols. The team develops the CSR and Safety Protocols, translating social necessity into operational requirements. Investment in TICs (video telephony, chat), and the demand for inclusive infrastructure (visual alarms, Hearing Loops) from suppliers.

3. Market Entry and Growth Validation.

Communication, and Marketing. Marketing is a manifestation of responsibility: Echo Journeys communicates on social media using Sign Language as well as Advertising content, and TICs solutions and safety protocols are validated with pilot travelers, basing growth on the Community's trust.

4. Consolidation and Expansion.

Standardization and Coherence. The formalization of Protocol Manuals reinforces the brand. Expansion focuses on the labor inclusion of Deaf individuals to ensure authenticity and maintain the internal consistency of visual codes.

5. Optimal Functioning and Internationalization.

Continuous Innovation and Market Leadership. Optimal functioning requires the verifiable and flawless performance of accessible systems. Internationalization is approached as a continuous responsibility to adapt to new Sign Languages and regulations, positioning the company as a global ethical benchmark.

Echo Journeys Entrepreneurship Profile

The consolidated profile of Echo Journeys is that of a leading operator whose main characteristic is Entrepreneurial Responsibility applied to functional inclusion.

I. Solution Focus (Accessibility Laboratory)

Echo Journeys does not limit itself to mere adaptation; it redesigns the travel experience from the Deaf perspective. Its profile is that of an accessibility laboratory that constantly tests and implements systems to guarantee equity in the experience.

II. Philosophy of Functional Empathy

The leadership profile translates into the following operational commitments:

Total Safety: The ethical commitment of Passion and Vision materialized by upholding the principle that "Everything that must be auditory for hearing people must be visual for Deaf people," through the demand for visual alarms and visual alert protocols in emergencies.

Deep Communication: The company commits to eliminating the traveler's communication anxiety by ensuring multimodal accessibility. This includes prioritizing Sign Language for the Deaf community, while simultaneously investing in technologies like the

Hearing Loop and FM systems for the hard-of-hearing, ensuring information is effortless and direct for every traveler.

III. Competitive Differentiator (Agent of Change)

The profile of Echo Journeys is that of a social change agent. It utilizes the entrepreneur's qualities to transform the needs of a niche into an ethical and profitable business model, demonstrating that Entrepreneurial Responsibility is the key to operational excellence and market leadership.

3.1.2 Market Niche

This section aims to identify the business opportunity by delimiting Echo Journeys' target market niche, which is part of the macro-segment of Accessible Tourism. However, Echo Journeys specializes in demand defined by communication barriers.

Delimitation and Justification of the Niche

Accessible Tourism includes travelers with any disability. However, Echo Journeys has identified a critical lack of specialization within this segment, which constitutes its niche: Tourism for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (and their companions).

Three principal reasons justify this choice.

Underserved Market. Most of the time, accessible tourism focuses on physical barriers, which are visible disabilities. In contrast, the communication barrier is inherently invisible, leading to its consistent neglect. Echo Journeys targets this underserved market by prioritizing this often-overlooked challenge, thereby excluding the Deaf and hard-of-hearing from meaningful engagement.

Potential Volume. The Deaf and hard-of-hearing community represents a significant group that travels with family and companions, which ensures the commercial viability of the niche.

Zero Competition. The low or zero competition from operators with multimodal protocols (Sign Language + TICs) allows Echo Journeys to position itself as a leader.

Operational Barriers as a Value Opportunity

The project's Entrepreneurial Responsibility translates into the elimination of the niche's specific barriers, transforming them into the service's core value proposition:

Operational Barrier Specific Niche Problem Echo Journeys Value Proposition.

Linguistic (The Different Logic) 70% of the Deaf population has difficulty understanding spoken and written language, invalidating the use of simple brochures or subtitles. Guarantee of primary communication in Sign Language and support systems like real-time typing for deep comprehension.

Technological/Safety. Risk and communication anxiety due to the lack of emergency alerts. This risk increases because the hearing disability is invisible, making travelers highly vulnerable to unforeseen dangers. Investment in assistive technology (Hearing Loops, FM systems) and the demand for visual alarms and comprehensive visual protocols for all travelers.

Fatigue and Isolation. Exhaustion from the constant effort of lip-reading and exclusion from group conversations. Designing tours with an appropriate pace and an environment where visual communication is the norm, allowing for complete relaxation and enjoyment of the experience.

3.1.3 Corporate Strategy: Echo Journeys

This section defines the corporate identity of the tour operator, ensuring that the brand image and foundational principles translate the philosophy of Entrepreneurial Responsibility into a cohesive and actionable strategy.

Logo and Slogan

Logo. For the Echo Journeys logo, the company chose a design that visually reflects the organization's passion for nature and its unwavering commitment to inclusion. The logo features a landscape rendered in olive green with mountains, trees, a path, a river, and a prominent sun. Crucially, the three words of the corporate slogan—Connect, Explore, Live—are integrated into the visual elements of the logo itself, making the brand statement inseparable from the image.

Figure 3.1

Echo Journeys Corporate Logo and Slogan



Note. Logo designed by the project team for the brand identity of Echo Journeys.

The design principles and symbolic representation of the Echo Journeys logo are detailed below, emphasizing the intentional connection between each visual element and the company's entrepreneurial responsibility.

Olive Green. The dominant color, symbolizing the lush nature of El Salvador, tranquility, and harmony. It represents our trails and the natural environment our travelers will explore, evoking feelings of safety and serenity. The color choice aligns with our Sustainability commitment and the goal of providing a calm, low-stress environment for all travelers.

Trees. The trees reinforce the focus on sustainability and the importance of forest environments for hiking. Aligns with our commitment to Sustainability and providing a calm, natural environment, justifying our emphasis on ecological tourism.

Mountains and Path. A direct representation of our core focus: hiking and trekking. These elements are the heart of our adventures, inviting clients to explore El Salvador's landscapes, overcome personal challenges, and enjoy nature at their own pace. The path specifically symbolizes the journey, discovery, and the accessible route Echo Journeys and travelers build together.

Justifies Echo Journeys core business and commitment to ensuring the Autonomy of the traveler in overcoming physical and psychological barriers. This addresses the fear of isolation and the mental barrier that prevents Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals from traveling independently.

The river. Adds an element of fluidity and life. It symbolizes the adaptability of our tours, demonstrating our openness to personalizing the experience and flowing with the client's desires. It also represents renewal and the constant flow of experiences and connections that are formed. Represents Visual Coherence and the flexibility required for true Functional Accessibility, showing adaptability in our operating model.

The Sun. Stands out as a symbol of energy, vitality, and the warmth Echo Journeys wants their travelers to experience on every adventure. It represents light, positivity, and the joy of

discovery in El Salvador. Echo Journeys aims for every tour to be a source of energy and well-being, a space where our clients can recharge and feel whole under the Salvadoran sun.

Slogan Integration. The words "Connect, Explore, Live" are seamlessly integrated into the landscape design, ensuring that the brand's promise of social connection and full experience is always present in the visual identity. Reinforces the Visual Coherence and confirms the holistic nature of the brand, where function (the words) and form (the landscape) are united.

Slogan. The slogan is a three-dimensional mandate that synthesizes the company's commitment to functional accessibility and authentic experience:

Connect. Social and Personal Responsibility. This pillar establishes a commitment to a multilayered connection. It ensures communication is effortless via Sign Language, allowing travelers to connect socially and build a lasting community. Furthermore, it encourages clients to engage with themselves (personal well-being) and connect with nature (environmental stewardship) throughout the journey.

Explore. Product Value and Empowerment. This element ensures that exploration of nature and culture is possible for everyone. It justifies the Creativity and Innovation used to adapt every route with TICs and safety protocols. More profoundly, it encourages travelers to explore their personal limits and abilities, fostering self-confidence and independence by demonstrating that communication barriers do not restrict the desire for adventure.

Live. Final Value Proposition: The culmination of Functional Accessibility and Fulfillment. The goal is to ensure a barrier-free experience, where the traveler achieves full autonomy and maximum enjoyment without communication anxiety. More critically, 'Live' is a declaration of full affirmation, signifying that clients can embrace unique and unforgettable

experiences, proving that a fulfilled life is entirely possible—and that the challenges of being Deaf or hard-of-hearing are differences, not limitations.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The foundational pillars of the company ensure that the strategic operation is ethically guided by the needs of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Mission

To create safe, authentic, and barrier-free travel experiences across El Salvador’s nature and culture. Echo Journeys achieves this by prioritizing Sign Language (L.S.) and assistive technology, ensuring full autonomy and confidence for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community in every journey.

Vision

To be the regional leader and definitive benchmark for functional and inclusive tourism, driving the industry toward Universal Design and maintaining a pioneering standard of Entrepreneurial Responsibility (CSR) for the global Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Values

These values represent the core commitments that drive operational decision-making:

Functional Accessibility: The commitment to design solutions that are not just compliant, but genuinely work for the user (e.g., Hearing Loop implementation over simple amplification).

Ethical Responsibility: Upholding the highest standards of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by ensuring labor inclusion and safety protocols (visual alarms).

Visual Coherence: Maintaining consistency in all visual communication, from signage to L.S. guiding, to reduce cognitive fatigue and enhance orientation.

Autonomy: Empowering travelers to navigate and enjoy their trip independently, without relying solely on hearing companions.

Quality Service: Delivering an experience that is excellent in both its tourist content and its accessible execution.

Authentic Experience: Guaranteeing deep, meaningful cultural and natural engagement, unhindered by communication barriers.

Sustainability: Operating with respect for the natural environment and local host communities.

This chapter successfully defined the operational and strategic framework for Echo Journeys, confirming that Entrepreneurial Responsibility is the core component of the business model. The detailed analysis of the Market Niche justified the specialized focus on eliminating communication and safety barriers for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing Community, validating the company's ethical necessity. Furthermore, the Corporate Strategy—articulated through its Mission, Vision, Values, and Slogan ("Connect, Explore, Live")—translates this responsibility into a cohesive, market-ready brand identity. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that Echo Journeys possesses a robust, ethically driven structure, positioning the tour operator for success by ensuring functional accessibility and emotional fulfillment for a previously underserved market.

CONCLUSIONS

This final project has successfully achieved its key objective: to develop a complete, viable, and socially responsible Business Profile for the specialized tour operator Echo Journeys, dedicated to offering inclusive hiking experiences for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in El Salvador. Through the meticulous conceptual design process detailed across Chapters I, II, and III, a solid framework was established that addresses the critical accessibility gaps identified in the current nature tourism sector. The model integrates the principles of sustainable development with specialized communication strategies, confirming the viability of Echo Journeys' high-quality tours to protected natural areas, such as Montecristo National Park, El Imposible National Park, and various aquatic attractions.

This research yields three fundamental contributions to the field of accessible tourism. Firstly, the Product Profile defined in Chapter I successfully translated the unique needs of the niche market into specific service qualities, utilizing sign language and assistive technology as cornerstones of service delivery. Secondly, Chapter II provided the necessary conceptual and resource context, linking the proposed operation to natural and cultural heritage management in El Salvador. Finally, the local development model established in Chapter III created a detailed strategic plan for Echo Journeys' organizational structure, defining its market niche, mission, vision, and corporate identity. These elements collectively demonstrate the project's potential to generate economic growth while promoting social equity and cultural inclusion.

The design process achieved the strategic goals defined at the onset of this work. The detailed operational and administrative framework met the general objective of establishing a viable model. Furthermore, the specific objectives, which included defining resource requirements, service qualities, and market positioning, were addressed through rigorous design

decisions supported by the theoretical and empirical context. The principal strategic conclusion of this project is that the creation of specialized, inclusive tourism products, such as those offered by Echo Journeys, represents not only an ethical obligation but also a sustainable competitive advantage for the Salvadoran tourism industry, particularly when focused on high-value, low-impact activities like guided hiking.

Ultimately, this project serves as a blueprint for future inclusive initiatives, paving the way for El Salvador to become a leader in accessible nature tourism within the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research and the observations made during field visits to various tourist destinations in El Salvador, it is evident that there is a significant accessibility gap for people with disabilities. To promote a more inclusive and equitable tourism environment, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, as well as the general public.

- **Training and Specialized Staff**

Tourist destinations and museums should implement specialized training programs for their staff, focusing on Salvadoran Sign Language (LESSA) and basic communication strategies. It will ensure that deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors have equal access to historical and cultural information, overcoming the current barriers in guided tours.

- **Audio-Visual Infrastructure and Signage**

Based on field observations, it should be to incorporate visual support technologies, such as QR codes linked to videos with sign language interpretation or printed scripts of the tours. Furthermore, the use of portable amplification systems is advisable to assist visitors with partial hearing loss, particularly in noisy environments such as restaurants or outdoor venues.

- **Universal Design and Inclusive Gastronomy**

Local tourism businesses and restaurants should adopt Universal Design principles. It includes providing menus with visual aids or digital formats and ensuring that safety instructions and general announcements are through clear signage. Moving towards an inclusive model will benefit not only people with disabilities but the entire tourist community by improving overall service quality.

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APPENDIX A

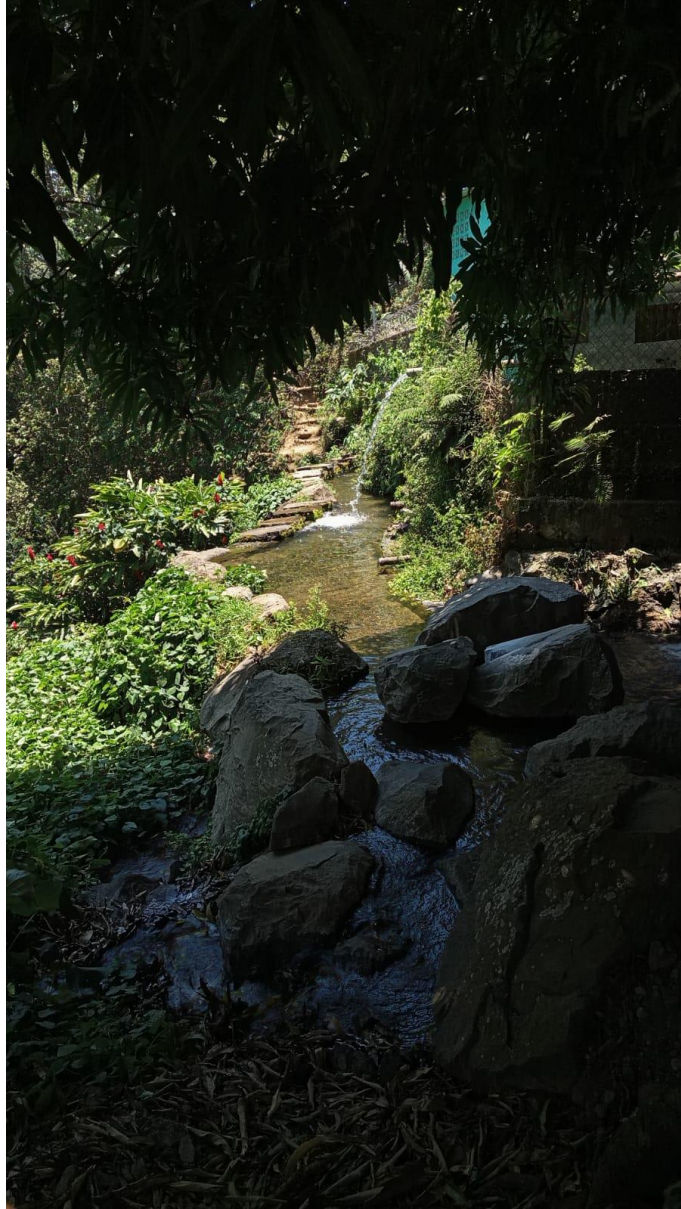
PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO JUAYÚA



Field assessment of trail conditions at "Las Siete Cascadas," Juayúa. Source: Prepared by the author

APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO JUAYÚA



Natural water basin at "*Las Siete Cascadas*," Juayúa. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO JUAYÚA



Forest density observed during the reconnaissance of *Las Siete Cascadas* hiking routes. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO DEININGER PARK



Authors at the Walter Thilo Deininger park's interpretive center during the introductory session on local ecosystem management. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO DEININGER PARK



Assessment of adventure tourism infrastructure: Canopy facilities and safety protocols at the Surf City Walter Thilo Deininger park. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO DEININGER PARK



Park ranger providing site information during the hiking activity. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE FIELD TRIP TO DEININGER PARK



Group reconnaissance hike towards the park's caves to evaluate trail accessibility and natural conditions. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX C

ENTREPRENEUR INTERVIEW AT LAKE ILOPANGO



Authors performing a reconnaissance tour of the aquatic routes at Lake Ilopango (Apulo).
Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX C

ENTREPRENEUR INTERVIEW AT LAKE ILOPANGO



Technical assessment of boat tour services and safety measures for tourism experiences.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX C

ENTREPRENEUR INTERVIEW AT LAKE ILOPANGO



Interview with a local boat operator and entrepreneur regarding his business model and service experience at Lake Ilopango. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX D

VISIT TO THE HISTORIC CENTER AND GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE



Authors at the starting point of the cultural heritage tour in the Historic Center of San Salvador. Source: Prepared by the authors.



Technical inspection of the facilities and visitor experience at the National Theater. Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX D

VISIT TO THE HISTORIC CENTER AND GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE



Observation of cultural guiding techniques and historical interpretation during the visit.
Source: Prepared by the authors.



Documentation of local street performance and cultural expressions in the theater plaza.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

APPENDIX D

VISIT TO THE HISTORIC CENTER AND GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE



Assessment of the local gastronomic offer as part of the integrated tourism experience.
Source: Prepared by the authors.