Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Aid in Santa Cruz LL, Guatemala

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Introduction

This study grew from a belief in the importance of personal relationships and genuine human connection, a concern for the well-being of people beyond the quantifiable realm of statistics, and a search for people who were making an investment in the life of their community. It became an investigation of nonprofit aid organizations of a cross-cultural character in an isolated indigenous town in Guatemala. Many foreigners had come to live in this remote setting on the side of a mountain overlooking a turquoise-blue lake rimmed by towering volcanoes. While there, I explored these foreigners’ attempts to reach out to the indigenous community, the relationships involved, and the successes and failures of these attempts.

My experience in Guatemala went far beyond the tasks of doing research. What this period of fieldwork was really about was living in solidarity with indigenous Guatemalans, listening to their concerns, needs, and desires, and looking for signs of hope in the attitudes and actions of their more-privileged neighbors. I found that despite the good intentions of foreign aid workers, cross-cultural misunderstandings occurred and caused frustration for both the givers and receivers of aid. These obstacles might be overcome by fully acknowledging cultural differences and listening to and trying to understand the perspective of the other. Perhaps the lessons in cross-cultural communication from this local context can find some application in the global relationships among diverse neighbors.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was three-part: to identify and describe existing sources of aid in Santa Cruz La Laguna, Guatemala; to explore the perspectives and experiences of the various groups involved; and to evaluate the effectiveness of aid projects from the varying viewpoints. While many questions and tangents were considered during the course of fieldwork, the guiding question was about the role and significance of personal relationships and networking among the various actors in the success or failure of the aid efforts.

Background

The topic for the present study developed from my initial interest in the experiences and perspectives of local residents in tourism destinations. The study was envisioned as an extension of research on ecotourism around Atitlán conducted in early 2008 that compared academic definitions of ecotourism with the images of ecotourism companies on Lake Atitlán as presented on their websites. That study hypothesized that projects that were part of larger efforts or that had significant partnerships were more successful at implementing the academic principles of ecotourism (Martin 2008, unpublished). The present study took a similar approach to a different topic, searching for various perspectives on the issue of international aid.
work. The hypothesis that networks were significant in success of ecotourism ventures led to the research question about networking and relationships in aid work.

Upon arrival at the research site I began to explore the interactions among different segments of the community with a specific interest in local-foreigner interactions. I found that tourism, both conventional and “eco”, was only one aspect of this dynamic. In fact, more interactions were happening between the local Maya and long-term foreign residents in Santa Cruz than between Maya and short-term tourists. During this preliminary phase of fieldwork I learned of several nonprofits in the area and decided that this type of aid-based interaction would serve as an appropriate focus for my study. In fact, this topic more directly addressed my interest in the well-being of locals and how the presence and actions of outsiders affected them. I also read about “help” as a subtheme of other past research on community relations in Santa Cruz (McGinnis 2006), which indicated that it was an area ripe for investigation.

Framework, Theories and Concepts

This study framed the efforts by foreign residents to aid the Mayan population within the general context of interactions and relationships between the foreign-born population along the shore and the majority Maya population farther up hill. Interestingly, Erve Chambers (2000) includes long-term foreign residents in his definition and discussion of tourism. Thus the aid organizations founded by foreign-born residents of the town could be seen as an extension of the tourism phenomenon.

Research was conducted with attention to the insider and outsider status of the varying actors involved. In Santa Cruz the host culture was that of the Maya, making them cultural insiders in the general sense. Cross-cultural communication occurred between the providers of aid and the Mayan recipients. My research asked how this cross-cultural dimension affected the process of giving and receiving aid. In order to answer this, I explored the varied experiences and perspectives of the two groups, and the relationships between them.

In terms of aid work, the Maya had the lived experience of having unmet material needs and of being the recipients of aid. Therefore, in determining what needs exist and ought to meet, the Maya also provide the emic perspective. While, the aid providers may have an outsider status in terms of cultural context and assessment of needs, they were still involved in the interactions and thus offer a distinct emic perspective. Thus this study sought out the various insider perspectives. As the researcher I was an outsider, not fully a part of the expatriate community or network of aid projects, and even further removed from the life and ways of the Mayan community.

In this paper I use the term “organizers” to refer to directors of organizations as well as other members of the foreign-born community involved in aid efforts in some way. I use “recipients” to refer to the Mayan Guatemalans, who I also refer to as “locals,” whom the aid efforts are designed to benefit. I do not use an academic definition of “aid,” but use it generally to refer to efforts to improve the lives of locals through the provision of material goods like school supplies, water filters, and medicines, as well as services such as health care, teaching and training. In Santa Cruz this aid was provided by various sources, including nonprofit organizations, intermittent projects and long-term programs with various sponsors.
Methods

My personal preferences and tendencies as a researcher led me to use a generally qualitative approach to this research. My specific methods were reviews of published information, systematic observation, unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviewing, time allocation studies, participation, event analyses, free listing and pile sorts.

I reviewed websites, newsletters, and advertisements of the aid organizations and hotels as background for and supplement to my observations and interviews. I conducted minimal academic literature-based background research.

I carried out systematic observation and description in the preliminary phases of research as I developed a sense of place and identified potential sites for investigation. I developed descriptions of the main sources of aid through further observation, and I observed the interactions among people at those sites in order to understand the relationships involved in the aid efforts.

I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the organizers of aid efforts, hotel owners and staff, and both foreign-born and Mayan residents of Santa Cruz. I conducted structured interviews in the form of a questionnaire in which I targeted locals as respondents.

I conducted a formal time allocation study for one day with a local employee of one of the aid organizations. After that I realized that I had been doing this form of observation and analysis informally all along without having realized it. I often made notes of what people were doing over a set period of time as I observed them, and I considered the amount of time used for socializing and relationship-building in comparison to time put in to more “concrete” or direct aid work.

I participated in the life of the community by living with a Mayan host family, attending church services, riding in lanchas for transportation, making purchases in the stores, using the library’s resources, spending time in the town center and eating in the hotel restaurants. My participation in the aid organizations themselves was limited. I attempted to arrange to be a regular volunteer at multiple sites, but was only able to serve as a volunteer on a few isolated occasions. I believe that all of my conversations and interactions with people in Santa Cruz were a valuable part of my participation and thus of my overall fieldwork and rapport-building.

I conducted a formal events analysis of the mini market, an effort of one hotel to stimulate the local economy.

I asked informants to create free lists of the names of key community members who were involved in community organizing and aid work. Through a pile sort exercise based in these lists I was able to record the networks and relationships that informants identified as important and was able to learn more about many key community members whom I did not get to meet in person.

Research site

Santa Cruz La Laguna is a town situated on the slopes of two hills on the shore of Lake Atitlán in the Western highlands of Guatemala. The estimates of residents place the total population of the central municipality and outlying villages at around 5-6,000. It is one of twelve Mayan towns around this lake, and is
one of the smaller, more isolated ones. The local community living up the hill is comprised of mainly Kaqchikel Maya who have lived there for generations, and over the past twenty years the shoreline of Santa Cruz has been populated by wealthy foreigners who have built large, private homes and five hotels. The Maya in Santa Cruz speak Kaqchikel Mayan and use Spanish in school and professional settings. English is the common language among the foreign-born population, most of whom, like the Maya, speak Spanish as a second language. The town is only accessible by boat, so that foreign-born residents, tourists and Maya alike arrive on lanchas (the motor boats used as ferries around the lake) at the dock down by the hotels. While the foreigners live almost exclusively in the lower area, Mayan residents walk fifteen minutes up a road laid with paving stones to reach their homes. This main road switches back and forth along one side of the steep ravine that divides upper Santa Cruz, and is wide enough to accommodate the two pick up trucks that are the only form of automotive transportation in town. There is one other footpath that comes down the far side of the other hill which constitutes the other side of the ravine. This path is mainly used by the foreigners who live along it on the lower half of that hill.

The residential area at the top of the hills is structured by a series of retaining walls parallel to the shore with paths running along the base of each wall and houses built above and below each side of these paths. Houses, stores and churches are all piled up right next to each other leaving very little open space in town. The most basic and most common homes are constructed of irregularly shaped and oversized mud bricks mortared together with cement. These houses are called adobe and have corrugated metal called lamina here, some of which are flat and others sloped off to one or both sides. The slightly nicer houses are built of cinderblock and are referred to as block. Some block houses have metal roofs, but the nicest ones have solid, flat cement roofs and are called “terrazas” since the roof space can be used as a terrace and also allows for the addition of other levels to the house or building later. Some block houses are left bare, while others are plastered over and painted. The majority of the town is filled with lamina-roofed adobe houses built so close together it is often hard to find the entrances. Among these are interspersed the nicer houses and an impressive number of stores. I counted 16 on the central hill alone, let alone the others in more peripheral parts of town. There are four Evangelical churches plus the main Catholic church on the town center and the charismatic branch of the Catholic church which has its own building just behind the church itself. The churches are all locked up during the day, which makes sense considering the expensive sound equipment that each of them contains. There are four cantinas in town where men go to drink on weekend nights, according to the local policeman who arrested three men for intoxication and causing a disturbance around midnight one Friday night while I was in the field.

There are several empty lots and numerous construction sites where houses, retaining walls, and new paths are being built. The paths throughout most of town are flat stones laid into a cement base. Very few paths seem to remain that are just dirt or mud. A new footbridge is being built at one of the highest levels of town in the crease of the ravine where the two hills meet. Rain runoff and water waste runs down this fold in the landscape and trash collects here, too. Scrawny, molting chickens pick through the mix of mud and garbage. It is common to see men hauling construction materials up the hill and throughout the town, using their upper backs and tying bands around their foreheads to support the weight. Bags of sand for mixing cement are piled in seemingly random spots.
The steepest parts of the ravine heading down to the bottom are tree-covered, and the mountains sides above towns are partially wooded, although deforestation is a problem according to many residents, both Mayan and foreign-born. Trees have been cut for firewood and to clear land for cultivation. A few fields are still used for growing crops in the hills and mountains surrounding Santa Cruz, but many deforested areas have been left barren. There are a few fruit-bearing trees among the houses (lemons, jocote, avocado) and a few houses have flower gardens. Besides the chickens which roam not only the ravine and wilder areas but also the streets houses and yards, there are also a good number of dogs. Some of them are calm and even friendly, but a few are territorial and snarl or bark threateningly when approached. Several times a day and often at night, the yowls of fighting dogs can be heard.

Besides the children, eager to greet me with "hola" and the hopeful plead "un quetzal?" (The basic unit of Guatemalan currency), there are women of all ages around the residential areas in the daytime. Many women in Santa Cruz can be seen weaving or embroidering in the outdoor areas around their homes. They use the backstrap loom technique which is a particular way of rigging up the weaving using the women's own bodies as anchors. Most homes have a patio area of packed earth, crisscrossed with clothes lines. Clothes, towels and blankets dry on the lines but also spread over bushes and draped over the tin roofs. Women still spend most of their time in the domestic sphere, but a few work in the hotel kitchens along the shore.

The past twenty years of the sale of land and its development by foreigners has been tied to a shift for the Maya from an agriculture-based economy to one based on wage labor. The presence of foreign residents and hotels along the shore in Santa Cruz has created numerous jobs close to home that never existed there before. Men now work as groundskeepers and guardians of private homes, construction workers, hotel staff and lancheros who have boats and ferry passengers across the lake. Traditional lines of work that continue include transporting goods and construction materials up the hill and collecting and distributing firewood. Up in the town men and women work as teachers in the local school, store owners and fill various roles in the health post and government offices. Private businesses include the numerous stores, three mills, two tailors, a combined office supply store and bakery, and one barber shop. The small stores sell mostly convenience items: snack foods and bottled beverages, plastic cups and dishes, pasta, rice, salt, soap, toilet paper and calling cards with cell phone minutes. On occasion fresh tomatoes, potatoes, eggs and frozen chicken are available. Unlike the larger towns around Lake Atitlán, Santa Cruz does not have a market. There is no central place where the people of Santa Cruz gather to buy and sell. Instead, women travel by lancha to the markets in other towns to purchase most food items and manufactured goods. Within Santa Cruz there is what outsiders would label an “informal economy” through which anything that can be produced in Santa Cruz is sold door to door: the women's weavings, baked goods, crabs and fish caught in the lake, fruit from trees in the hills or on private property.

Besides the churches, all other key institutions are organized around the center of town. There is no Spanish-style plaza or park in Santa Cruz, instead the central space is a cement field with lines for both basketball and soccer and both hoops and soccer goals. There are usually games of each sport going on simultaneously on this one field. Along the side of the field which overlooks the lake are the school buildings and library. Across from the school is the Puesto de Salud, a Health Post provided by the Guatemalan Health Ministry. On the other two ends of the field are the town hall and the Catholic Church. The town hall is a
large three-story terraza building that is always bustling with activity. It and the Puesto de Salud are easily the nicest buildings in town. The town hall has government offices, jail cells, the police officer's living quarters and office, and a large meeting space with a stage also used for movies, performances and social gatherings.

Data: Descriptions of Main Aid Organizations

I identified four main aid organizations in Santa Cruz that were a visible presence in the community and whose organizers were foreign-born residents of Santa Cruz. In other words, these were the ones that I found by being in the town, by talking to people in both parts of the community. In fact I found them all without even looking, before I had decided that aid efforts would be the topic of my research, which might indicate that they truly are important parts of the life of the community. They are Amigos de Santa Cruz Foundation, Casa Milagro, the School Library Association of Santa Cruz La Laguna, and Mayan Medical Aid. A fifth source of aid which will be treated briefly here, are the projects of the various hotels. Descriptions in Spanish of the four main sites are included in Appendix A.

The Amigos de Santa Cruz Foundation is a nonprofit that was started in 1998 by a group of foreign-born residents of Santa Cruz. Ten years later it is the largest nonprofit based in the town and is well-known by members of both the Mayan and expatriate communities. During the period of my fieldwork, the director of the foundation, Patricia Torpie, was back in the US, and I was not able to meet her. I did speak a great deal with two local men who are the assistant directors of the organization and who supervise its projects in Patricia’s absence. In their words, the main goal of Amigos is to help the children of Santa Cruz. The stated mission of the Foundation is “to help improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz through support for better education, health, a cleaner environment and economic development” (Patricia Torpie, email to author, June 27, 2008).

I was able to observe teachers in the primary school reading with their students in a program designed and supported by Amigos de Santa Cruz. I also attended an afterschool program that taught fourth graders about recycling in partnership with another nonprofit in town, Mayan Medical Aid. Amigos de Santa Cruz also distributes Onil fuel-efficient stoves and ecological water filters to families at minimal cost to them. I saw these ecofiltros (ecofilters) and stoves in homes, offices, and classrooms throughout Santa Cruz. I also heard about the plans for a new vocational center and saw blueprints and promotional material for the building campaign. Construction was scheduled to begin in August 2008. The vocational center, officially named Centro de Capacitación or CECAP, will provide training in sewing, weaving, carpentry, welding, electricity, business management and more. It will eventually house a restaurant and store with local products. Other projects of Amigos that I heard about include teacher training programs for primary school teachers, nutritional and health education for mothers in outlying villages, a daily snack program for primary age students, and a scholarship program for secondary students.

Amigos de Santa Cruz has its office in the upstairs of the Puesto de Salud and makes use of the flexible classroom and meeting space in that building as well. For Amigos this space serves mostly as an administrative center from which the projects, delivered in school, library and homes, are orchestrated. The office is well-equipped with computers, wireless internet, and printers, but there is not much storage space.
Amigos de Santa Cruz has a well-maintained website (http://amigosdesantacruz.org) and has an annual, printed newsletter, both in English.

Casa Milagro is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to support teenage girls, mothers, children, and widows in Santa Cruz, Guatemala. The house is located just off the main road at the top of the hill. The entrance steps to the casa (house) lead up from the path and brightly-painted retaining wall to the yard which is an open dirt area with an avocado tree, a eucalyptus tree, bamboo-like grasses and vibrant flowers. The wall and gate feature designs painted by the children—a sun, flowers, smiling faces and hearts. Inside the casa there is a main room with large windows and a spacious kitchen that also has chalkboards. There are plenty of painted, wooden chairs and tables and a few shelves of supplies in each room.

Thilda, the director of “the project” (el proyecto) as it is called, arrived in Santa Cruz from Germany nearly twenty years ago. She says that the project developed slowly. At first she met with women in the Puesto de Salud, after consulting with a group of anthropologists from Austin, Texas who told her that nutrition was one of the greatest needs in the town. At the first meeting that Thilda arranged, seven women showed up for a talk on nutrition from the nurse. Not long after, Thilda realized that the women needed money in order to be able to afford nutritious food, and so she began developing the cooperative that would allow the women to make and sell handcrafted items. Today, Casa Milagro works with mothers of malnourished children, helping them to sell handcrafted artisan goods so that they can earn some income and thus provide for their children. Many of the women are already capable weavers, and through the project they improve their skills and learn to use sewing machines and also to make beaded jewelry. Groups of women also gather at the house for educational programs on health, hygiene, nutrition, family planning, and parenting skills. Casa Milagro encourages the women and children to visit the Puesto de Salud for needed care and also invites nurses to give seminars and check-ups at the house. Casa Milagro also seeks to improve the quality of life of elderly widows through constructing simple houses or improving existing homes, providing beds and simple furniture, and helping them to obtain government pensions by covering the associated legal costs.

On weekday mornings there is a kindergarten at the casa for the children of the women in the cooperative. In the afternoons the women’s older children come in for afterschool activities. Currently Florinda, a young Kaqchikel woman from the nearby town of San Marcos, works full-time at the casa. She teaches the kindergarten, plays with the children in the afternoon, and has the important role of interpreter in Thilda’s meetings with the women, many of whom speak only Kaqchikel and very little Spanish. There is also a team of women elected as leaders by the cooperative who help organize the purchase and distribution of materials and the production of weavings and jewelry.

La Cruceñita is the library for the school and the entire community in Santa Cruz. It now has an estimated 5,000 books and three computers with internet as well as a number of typewriters which are used regularly by the students. It is near the school buildings on the town center, and is an important resource for students of all levels that enables them to complete their research and homework assignments. The two librarians are young adults from Santa Cruz, and they are constantly at work improving and maintaining the facilities, organizing and cataloguing the books, and helping the students develop their research skills.
I spent a good amount of time at the library using the internet, reading with the younger students, and talking with the librarians. On weekday mornings students from the secondary school do their work and research while the primary school is in session. In the afternoons the secondary students go to school and the younger students make use of the library. Students in the primary school not only do their homework at the library but also enjoy a large collection of picture books. Students of all ages meet and socialize in the library as well. Most of my interactions were with the librarians, since the library’s director Merlina Barnes who is originally from the US, was away and only returned to Guatemala near the end of my research period. According to Merlina, the library’s main purpose is to provide a quiet learning environment for the students. In my experience, however, it is a dynamic environment that is just as much a social meeting point as it is a study hall.

La Cruceñita is supported through the School Library Association of Santa Cruz La Laguna (Asociación Biblioteca Escolar Santa Cruz La Laguna or ABESCLL), which is an autonomous organization that does not receive funding from any other organization or foundation. Donations to ABESCLL are processed through Amigos de Santa Cruz, however, which is registered as a nonprofit in the US, the country from which most donations for both organizations originate. Currently, the library depends on the generosity of its local and international donors in order to cover all of its expenses: salaries for the librarians, the purchase of more books, and the general maintenance and improvement of the library building itself. ABESCLL publishes an annual printed newsletter which is distributed to potential donors in Guatemala and the US.

Mayan Medical Aid is a nonprofit clinic that has been operating since 2004 out of the Puesto de Salud in Santa Cruz in partnership with the Guatemalan government’s Health Ministry. The clinic began as a project of Amigos de Santa Cruz, but is now an independent organization. The stated mission of Mayan Medical Aid is “to break the cycle of poverty and malnutrition, while maintaining the important cultural traditions of the Maya” (Mayan Medical Aid 2006). The organization’s ultimate goal is to establish a self-sustaining health center managed by a capable local staff.

The clinic provides primary care and has outreach projects in nutrition, health care, and sanitation. The Medical and Dental Spanish Program for students, residents, and practicing physicians sustains the organization financially and provides participants the experience of cultural immersion, opportunities for involvement in the clinic, and Spanish language instruction. Volunteers from abroad also contribute to the organization’s projects in the community. The Clinic itself is a welcoming space for the community, where children come for educational activities and to spend time reading and coloring while they wait for their dental and doctor appointments.

The organization was established by Craig A. Sinkinson, M.D., a doctor from the US. The MMA clinic is currently staffed by Dr. Craig, his wife Dr. Carmen who is Guatemalan, and Guadalupe who is a Guatemalan nurse who also speaks Kaqchikel. Patients refer to the doctors and nurse by their first names. People in town did not seem to distinguish the Mayan Medical Aid clinic, which is on the second floor of the Puesto de Salud, from the government clinic on the first floor. Mayan Medical Aid supplements the basic care provided by the government clinic. According to Dr Craig, the Guatemalan government does not supply a very wide range of medications, and so MMA provides most of the medicines used in both offices.
Five hotels in Santa Cruz were also included in this study with respect to their social and environmental practices. Each tries to support the Mayan community through employment opportunities and occasional and/or ongoing aid projects. These hotels represent the for-profit side of international development, yet each hotel owner cited improvements in the life of the local community as an integral part of their business approach. Descriptions of the hotels in both English and Spanish are included in Appendix B.

Data and Analysis: Varying Perspectives

The above descriptions largely reflect the perspectives of the organizers themselves. They represent the official faces of the aid organizations as well as the things that I was able to observe as an outsider myself. In further interviews with aid organizers and other community members, difficulties and frustrations were discovered. I heard about the disillusionment of many who had been doing aid work for years and who had striven to uphold the ideals of international aid and development work. Many of them agreed that the ideal approach to aid was to do what the local community itself identified as needing to be done. However, when it came to actually working with the local community, some had experienced difficulties with communication and implementation. One disenchanted informant told me that “if you only do what the people want, then nothing gets done.” Several other informants worried that the recipients of aid were not appreciative enough, that they took the aid for granted, or that they did not take full advantage of the resources made available to them. Similarly, most foreign organizers agreed that it was better to ask recipients of aid for something in exchange for the services and resources provided. They dismissed “handouts” and “giveaways” as ineffective. One informant reasoned that the recipients of aid would value the resources made available to them more if they had to pay, work, or participate in order to receive them.

In general, the foreign-born organizers of aid efforts in Santa Cruz recognize the need for members of recipient community to be involved in the provision of aid in some way. This has led to complex relationships with the Maya community as partners, co-directors, employees, and committee members and also as beneficiaries and recipients of the aid.

Many organizers also noted that their own area of expertise was an important factor in the success or failure of their aid efforts. In some cases limited experience in or knowledge of a certain area fruitful collaborations between different organizations that I observed occurred when two groups brought together their varied expertise to do together what they could not have done alone. Conversely, tension arose between groups when one felt that another was trying to work in an area that they were not prepared to work in.

I gained further insight into the relationships among the organizations and the larger expatriate community through a pile sort. I gave both foreign-born and Mayan informants a stack of cards which had the names of individuals from both communities on them. I asked them to group the names according to who worked with who when it came to helping the residents of Santa Cruz. The resulting piles (and in some cases spatial arrangements) showed the extent of the networks of support that each organization had in town. Not surprisingly the largest networks centered on the largest and most well-established aid organization. The comments made by informants as they sorted also indicated that factors like personality and nationality do influence who works with whom. The pile sort also offered further evidence that the expatriates have a
separate culture and community from Maya and Guatemalan residents of Santa Cruz since names of Mayan community leaders were rarely connected to foreigners in the piles.

Another important aspect of the experience of expatriates working in aid in Santa Cruz is their international connections and mobility. The organizations all depend on international sources of funding, be it through donations, income from sale of products or services, or receiving international volunteers. The directors of the organizations travel to their native countries to promote their organizations and gain support abroad. English newsletters and websites reach North American and European audiences, as well.

The owners of hotels in Santa Cruz all claim to focus on hiring, training and building relationships with local employees. While some hotels have side projects to benefit the community, most hotel owners agree that hiring local staff is their contribution to the Mayan community. Most also have a considerable number of foreign staff, especially in administrative, managerial and customer service positions.

My understanding of the local perspective has been informed by my experience of living in Santa Cruz in the home of a Mayan family throughout the course of my fieldwork. I began to approach this perspective through observation, conversation, participation, and time spent in the public spaces of Santa Cruz and at the aid sites.

The general attitude of Mayans toward their foreign-born neighbors seems to be positive because of the jobs that their presence has created. Still, when a foreigner ventured up the hill beyond the lower area of hotels and chalets (the local term for the large homes of the relatively wealthy foreigners) it attracted attention. The Guatemalans and foreigners still live in distinct sections of Santa Cruz, (up hill and down hill respectively). The two segments of the population regularly come together to work but rarely to socialize. One store owner, whose customers are almost exclusively Mayan, told me that in the past men went to work in other towns and had to spend much time away from home. He said that now with the foreigners residing in Santa Cruz there are jobs in town and people don’t have to travel to find work, giving them more time with their families. A lanchero talked about how the tourists bring him more business. A carpenter, however, said that things could still be better since the jobs that are currently available to Mayans in Santa Cruz are low-skill and minimum wage. The lanchero and carpenter also made it a point to say that Guatemalans had to always treat foreigners well because they depend on their business. Women felt lack of opportunity to work outside the home, saying that hotels can only hire a finite number of cooks. Many locals were quick to point out that aid organizations don’t help everyone. Like the hotels, their impact is limited to only a few members of the Mayan community.

Toward the end of the research period, I administered a survey to eleven local Maya. The survey prompted respondents with a list of forms of aid and asked them to name any organizations that they knew of that provided each kind of aid. The most frequently named sources of aid were Amigos de Santa Cruz, Atitlán SEC (now officially re-named as the Catholic Foundation for Children and Aging), the Puesto de Salud (a term which vaguely referred to the Mayan Medical Aid clinic or the government clinic and sometimes to both) and Casa Milagro.

Many other sources of aid were identified by locals in the survey beyond the four main organizations which my research had focused on. All in all twenty-two sources were named, representing local and national government programs, Guatemalan and international organizations, local committees, individuals,
and churches. This shows the wider range of sources of aid available to residents of Santa Cruz beyond those organized by foreigners living in the community. These are some of the other frequently-cited sources of aid in the survey: AMSCLAE, an environmental program of the Guatemalan government; Vivamos Mejor, a community organization focusing on disaster preparedness; CONALFA, a literacy program for adults; Mi Familia Progresa, a program of the national government; the mayor and town government.

One of the most frequently named sources was Atitlán SEC, which was named by 10 out of 11 survey respondents. I had not studied that organization at all prior to the survey, although I had heard it mentioned a few times. I was not able to contact anyone from that organization or find any official information. According to one informant, this is the regional name for the Christian Foundation for Children and the Aging. The Foundation no longer refers to the Atitlán program as “Atitlán SEC,” but that is the only name that most people in Santa Cruz knew it by. They told me that Atitlán SEC distributed items like shoes, clothes or food staples once a month to families who were on their list. While some gringos criticized it and other similar programs for giving handouts, survey respondents saw it as one of the most helpful programs because it is reliable. They receive something every month, and they receive a variety of items. Atitlán SEC is targeted at supporting children and elderly, but in the experience of recipients the aid actually benefitted entire families since they had to spend less money on those basic items every month.

In the survey I also asked whether respondents had collaborated with any of the programs, individuals or organizations that they had named. I then asked them to rate how difficult it was to work with that party. Ratings of “difficult” on the survey were given by many locals who had worked with local and national government initiatives to provide services in their community. Their frustrations were not with working with other organizers, which is what I intended the question to be about, but were about dealing with the intended recipients of the aid services. Thus, some Mayans who had worked in the service of their community had had similar experiences as the foreign-born organizers who were frustrated by their own experiences. In both cases the people providing the aid worried that the intended recipients were not motivated to take full advantage of what they were being offered. For instance, a local woman I surveyed who had taught with CONALFA said that it was difficult for her because the women who were her students lacked animo (energy or motivation). This perceived lack of motivation among the intended recipients of aid efforts could be an important area for further investigation.

The survey concluded with an open-ended question about what the respondent thought the greatest needs of the community were. The greatest needs as identified by survey respondents were for improved education and vocational training, better work and income, more work and income for women, roads and housing. This portion of the survey was less structured, and the results, which will be discussed in depth below, were very insightful.

In considering the varying perspectives of the different groups, one point of disagreement was their perceptions of the relative wealth or poverty of Santa Cruz. According to informants, the Guatemalan government recently listed SC as one of the 40 poorest municipalities in Guatemala. Many informants from both the Mayan and foreign populations in Santa Cruz were aware of this, but their opinions about it differed. Most foreigners said that Santa Cruz was probably among the wealthiest towns of its size in Guatemala because of all of the jobs in hotels, construction and with private homeowners. They believed
that the government’s categorization was political—that the government had really listed the forty towns where they would like resources to be invested in order to bring in more tourists. On the other hand, some locals cited the government’s categorization as evidence that they really are one of the poorest towns in their country and as a sign of hope that more aid might be coming. From my observations I can say that Santa Cruz does have the economic advantage of tourism development and foreign residents to provide jobs. However, other towns also have this source of revenue, some to a greater extant than Santa Cruz and some to a lesser extent. While this town has hotels where visitors can spend the night, it lacks day-time attractions. During the day tourists spend time at their hotels, on the water, or visiting other sites around the lake. The lack of a market or other shopping for both locals and foreigners is a big disadvantage. While many employed adults pointed toward the presence of foreign residents and tourists as an important source of jobs and income today and a big improvement from the past, the survey respondents pointed to the continued need for more and better jobs as one of the greatest needs in the town.

One thing that both groups agreed on was that education has been the biggest improvement in Santa Cruz in recent years. Locals told of how only a minority of children studied in the past and how they hope for even more educational opportunities for their children. The expatriates also reported that the number of students enrolled and the quality of education has been the biggest accomplishment over the last twenty years. More research would be needed in order to determine the factors which contributed to this and how much of the improvement is due to the involvement of the foreign-born residents and specifically the work of Amigos.

Another point of agreement was on the improvements in healthcare in Santa Cruz since the opening of the private clinic four years ago. Originally a project of Amigos, the clinic doctors sought to work with the Guatemalan Health Ministry in order to bring better health services to the town. As an independent nonprofit, Mayan Medical Aid continues to work with and supplement the government-provided care. According to informants, there was only one nurse with minimal training and basic equipment in the Puesto de Salud prior to this. While locals and foreigners (including a hotel guest who was treated there) agree that the availability and quality of services is much-improved, I sensed some reservations from the Maya. My general observations and focused interviews uncovered a certain reluctance to go seek care. This may be a manifestation of a larger cultural norm discourages people from showing pain, weakness or need. Multiple women said that they felt ashamed to be seen going to the doctor. This was not a central area of my research, however, and remains as a potential for future study.

My own perspective and experiences represents that of a short-term visitor and outsider. While I initially hoped to serve as a short term volunteer with two of the organizations, no formal arrangements were ever worked out. One organizer even approached me suggesting that we schedule a formal activity, but communication was never established among all of the individuals involved and the activity never managed to get it off the ground. I was able to contribute in small ways and informally a few times, but I never fully understood the approach to planning and organization among the local Maya with whom I was trying to work.

I attended a few key events in the community, but missed several others due to last-minute announcements. Again, a different approach to planning and communication came into play. I preferred to plan my days ahead of time so that I could make the best use of my limited time in the field, however many
things were not publicized until the information was relevant. For instance the distribution of items from Atitlán SEC was announced just a few hours before the distribution began. Similarly, the distribution of financial aid through the national government-run program Mi Familia Progresa was announced the night before. Announcements were made over a loudspeaker from the top of the church in the center of town. If there were other methods of public announcements I was not aware of them. While I felt that I missed out on important opportunities to observe these events, I learned an important lesson about cultural differences in communication and time management.

Analysis: Needs Identified by Mayan Informants

In the open-ended portion of the survey, the underlying need most often discussed by locals was for education and vocational training. In response to the structured interview questions, 2 out of 11 respondents named organizations with vocational programs, 4 said that they had heard of plans to build a vocational center and 5 said that there was none and they had not heard any plans. There are in fact plans in the works to build a Centro de Capacitación, nicknamed CECAP, which is a project of Amigos de Santa Cruz. In fact, construction was scheduled to begin in August of 2008, which was a little over a month away when the survey was administered. From the survey, it seemed like few locals knew about those plans, though, which raises questions about how well the opportunities there will be publicized in the future and how accessible the training will be. On the other hand, 10 of 11 survey respondents did name at least one organization that provides scholarships for primary and/or secondary education.

The second most frequently named need by locals was for better work opportunities and higher income. Nearly all of them related this desire directly to the need for improved education and vocational training. It remains to be seen whether the vocational center will meet the expressed needs of the community. No structured question directly addressed this issue in the survey. Beyond the survey, the local perspective seemed to be that the increase in job opportunities thanks to the presence of foreigners was one improvement in Santa Cruz in recent decades, however others lamented that they were still limited to minimum wage and low-skill jobs. Also, hotel owners make a point to hire local staff and in most cases educate employees and support them through personal relations beyond work. However, my observations indicated that hotel practices only benefit the few locals that the hotels employ, not the community as a whole. One main reason that tourism is not benefiting the Mayan community more is that there are no stores or markets where locals can sell to tourists or foreigners. One hotel attempted to start a Saturday morning mini-market this past year, however there has been disappointingly low turnout by both Mayans and tourists. The three times that I went, the majority of people there, both vendors and shoppers, were foreign-born long term residents.

More specifically, several survey respondents highlighted the need for improved work and income for indigenous women in Santa Cruz. In response to prompting, a few respondents were able to name sources of aid for women, but all said that they were not very helpful. Like with the hotels, the work being done by the existing nonprofits in the area of women’s empowerment is limited in scope. CEAP, the new vocational center, will serve women by providing training in workshops and space to for them to sell their products. In my observation, there seemed to be the limited opportunities for women to work in the hotels and informal
economy of the town. Women did sell door to door occasionally. A number of female informants said that they would like to have a store or market where all of the women of the town could sell their weavings and other goods to residents of the town and to visitors.

One major need that was not addressed at all in the structured survey questions or through other formal research techniques was the need for better housing or, in some cases, any housing at all. Several respondents to the survey cited this as a major need in Santa Cruz, however. One existing aid organization does build houses for the elderly, and some respondents did mention this. However, in my research I came across no organization that provides housing, home improvements, or shelter to groups besides the elderly and widows. I did however hear from several young women who had difficult family situations, single-parent homes, or had been the victims of abuse and/or neglect who felt that they had no place to go and no option other than to rely on the charity of individuals or other families in the community.

**Analysis: Networking and Relationships**

With respect to the initial research question about the role of networking and relationships in aid work, there seem to be three levels of relationships that are significant. First there are the international relationships through which the foreign-born aid organizers based in Santa Cruz solicit support for their organizations. As mentioned previously, international networks are an important source of funds for the organizations and in some cases provide a key market for the sale of goods and services funneled through the aid organizations. The second level of relationships exists among the aid organizers and expatriate community in Santa Cruz. Members of the foreign-born population there are also a source of donations, volunteer labor, and moral support for the primary aid organizers. In some cases organizations have achieved successful collaborations and built up large support networks. Just as important are the tensions and negative relationships which exist on the individual and organizational level among the foreigners, which may limit the success of aid efforts. The third significant level of relationships is between the foreign-born organizers and the local, Mayan population. Again, these are complex relationships where locals are not only the beneficiaries of aid but also partners in providing it. One fact that may limit the success of aid efforts is the limited connection between aid organizations and the local Mayan leadership.

There is one organization in Santa Cruz which is viewed as particularly successful by the residents there. This organization also has successful and extensive relationships in all three identified areas. It is credited by many foreigners, even those not directly involved with it, for having a high level of local involvement in the provision of services. It has the largest network by far of expatriate supporters, and receives funding from other large national and international organizations as well as individual donors aboard. This organization succeeds perhaps in part because it has strong ties at all three levels. However, the present study was not exhaustive enough to conclude that these relationships alone account for its purported success or to really understand if the organization is succeeding and on what terms.

The most challenging relationship of the three types identified seems to be the one between locals and foreigners. In the relationships within the foreign-born population there is not as much of a cultural gap as in the relationships between Mayans and foreigners. Also, the international connections of the expatriates are often with people in the organizers’ countries of origin where the culture and language are familiar. Thus,
the real challenge is to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between aid organizers and beneficiaries who come from varied national and ethnic backgrounds. While aid organizers in Santa Cruz held a shared ideal of relationships with locals that go beyond giving and receiving concrete aid, they reported frustration in achieving these deeper connections. For their part, locals often referred to foreign organizers by name rather than by the name of their organization. This would indicate that personal relationships were present and important to them. However, many locals cited Atitlán SEC, an “outside” aid program that simply delivers goods with no ongoing relational component, as the most helpful source of aid. Thus there was no clear indication of how valuable personal relationships are to Maya in situations where they are receiving aid.

**Analysis: Evaluation of Effectiveness**

In bringing together the varying viewpoints from Santa Cruz in order to consider the effectiveness of the aid organizations, two related themes arise. First, among the parties involved, there seem to be conflicting concepts of aid. Second, there is a need for cultural interpreters who bridge the gap between these varied approaches.

A general difference in the concepts of aid seems to be that the recipients of aid focus on their short-term needs while the aid organizers take a longer-term approach. The two groups do not always share the same goals. The foreign aid organizers in Santa Cruz are interested in helping the recipients of aid become self-sufficient. Their concept is expressed well in the saying “If you give a man a fish he’ll be hungry again tomorrow. Teach him to fish, and he’ll never go hungry again.” While many recipients of this kind of aid are willing to learn, the situation in Santa Cruz suggests that they still feel their immediate “hunger” and continue to look for immediate ways to meet their needs. One woman told me that when she was a child her father made so little money every day and that he had to spend it all right away in order to have food for his children the following day. This painful awareness of day to day needs might be why so many locals cited free donations as one of the most helpful kinds of aid. They offer immediate, although temporary, relief. Survey respondents from the Mayan population found the “giveaways” from Atitlán SEC to be very helpful, and some said they did not consider projects which required them to pay or work to really be “aid” or “help.”

This might be the underlying explanation for the reason recipients of aid did not respond with the motivation and gratitude that organizers expected from them. When asked to pay or do work in exchange for something, the recipients came to see the interaction as a business transaction, and thus did not see it as a help for which they must express gratitude. For instance, tension arose between an organizer and recipients in one organization because the recipients of the aid perceived that the organizer was benefitting from the aid project. The recipients believed that they needed the available resources more than the organizer did. They accepted that they were asked to do something in order to receive the aid, but they felt that they deserved more for what they were already doing. The organizer approached the interaction as one of doing a favor or providing a help by making resources available to the recipients, but the recipients saw the relationship as one of employment. The recipients were focused on the resources gained, with their participation as a means to that end. The organizer, however, wanted the recipients to develop valuable
skills through their participation in the organization. Those intangible skills were not valued as highly by the participants as by the providers of aid. The tension was worsened because the organizer and locals communicated in very different ways which prevented them from seeing and understanding each other’s perspective. They had not realized the importance of having a cross-cultural interpreter.

Aid organizers know that their own cultures and native languages are different from those of the Kaqchikel Maya in Santa Cruz, but my research suggests that they still struggle to find the best way to overcome those differences and achieve real communication and understanding. Of the various relationships observed in this study, the most successful and productive ones included clearly identifiable interpreters. Language is an obstacle in some cases where Spanish is the common tongue and also a second language for all parties involved. However, beyond this linguistic gap there is a broader cultural separation which is an even larger hurdle precisely because it is not as visible. In all observed cases the role of cultural interpreter was filled by a Guatemalan who had been raised in the Mayan culture and then achieved a higher level of education. They had previous exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking, to foreign languages and cultures. These interpreters were relatively comfortable with both the foreigners and the locals. They could code switch successfully. In the aid organizations they play the role of organizer but remain culturally and linguistically linked to the group that they are serving. In each of the organizations studied there was at least one person who filled this role, but their success was limited by factors like their level of involvement in the organization, whether their role was acknowledged and understood within the organization, and how experienced and comfortable with the foreign culture they really were. The more efficient organizations had cultural interpreters that played a significant role in the operations of the organization.

Results and Conclusions

The purposes of this study were each fulfilled, although in each case there remains much more to be discovered through longer-term research.

The first stated objective was to identify and describe the existing sources of aid in Santa Cruz. While this was accomplished on a small scale, there were many sources of aid identified that were not fully explored. Research focused on the organizations started by foreign-born residents based in the town. One important finding of the study was that there are in fact many sources of aid to the community beyond those four main nonprofits.

The second objective was to explore the perspectives and experiences of the various groups involved. While only a preliminary understanding could be reached in the allotted time, a significant amount of data was also collected in this area. The two main groups, Maya and foreigners who are recipients and organizers of aid, respectively, do seem to have significantly different perspectives on the status of aid work in Santa Cruz.

The final purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of aid projects from these varying viewpoints. Research showed that both groups felt that improvements had been made through aid work, but both also expressed frustration and concern that the existing projects were not effective enough.

These findings all contributed to the analysis of the importance of personal relationships and networking among the various actors in the success or failure of the aid efforts. While networking on a
regional and international scale was found to be important, it was the local, cross-cultural relationships that most affected the perceived success or failure of organizations.

In conclusion, there is evidence that varying perspectives are limiting the effectiveness of aid work in terms of the reception by the target community, and the satisfaction of the organizers. Most success has been made when intermediaries are able to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap in order to put the ideals of outsiders into action in a way that the local, Kaqchikel community can understand and engage in.

Limitations

The depth of this study was limited primarily by the short length of field work and by the extended preliminary investigation and development of the topic which occurred in the field. This in turn limited the scope of the study since I was only able to focus on a few organizations and did not fully investigate the role of other sources of aid such as government programs. The study also lacks sufficient background research on academic theories of international aid work. One unavoidable limitation was that many foreign residents including aid organizers were away for the season and were not present for observation or interview. Finally, the cultural gap was difficult to overcome in such a short amount of time. Besides the lack of depth in my understanding of the host culture, cultural differences in planning, organization, and communication also led to practical limitations when arranging visits and interviews.

Further Study

Considering the small scale and short duration of this study, it could be considered a pilot study because it generated many ideas for further research. Most significantly, future applied research on the particular cultural differences that exist in the community could suggest specific ways for aid organizers to overcome them for the benefit of all. Especially useful would be an exploration of the perceived lack of motivation among the intended recipients of aid in order to determine whether they truly are resisting participation in the aid projects and if so why. Extended interviews and surveying about the greatest needs of community in the view of Mayan residents would also be valuable. Long-term studies could be done to follow-up on the success and lasting effects of particular aid efforts. Since this study focused on interactions involving long-term foreign residents, research could be done on the actual and potential roles of short term visitors, tourists, and volunteers. Further study could also be done on the apparent reluctance of some Maya to seek medical care. More background on Guatemalan government programs and services is another potential as well as in-depth studies of the other sources of aid that were briefly identified in this study. Comparative studies of aid work in other cross-cultural contexts could explore the presence of a cultural gap and the role of interpreters in those situations.

Applied Aspect of Study

One additional element of this fieldwork was the creation and distribution of a directory of aid organizations in Santa Cruz. It includes the ten main businesses and organizations in Santa Cruz which work for the benefit of local residents. The descriptions of each business and organization were edited by the owners and organizers and printed with their approval.
This directory was intended to support the efforts of businesses and organizations by making data available as a tool for future collaboration among them, for use by tourists and visitors who are interested in getting involved, and as a way to share information with others in the U.S. The descriptions of the aid organizations and hotels included in Appendices A and B are excerpted from the directory.

**References Cited**


**Appendix A**

Amigos de Santa Cruz

La fundación Amigos de Santa Cruz es una organización no lucrativa fundada en 1998 cuya misión es “ayudar a mejorar la vida de la gente de Santa Cruz a través de apoyo para mejor educación, salud, un medio ambiente sano, y desarrollo económico.” Sus proyectos incluyen programas de capacitación para los maestros de la escuela primaria, educación sobre la nutrición y salud para madres en las aldeas remotas, refacciones nutritivas diariamente para estudiantes de la escuela primaria, como también becas para estudiantes de nivel básico o secundario. Amigos distribuye estufas “Onil” que son muy eficientes con respecto al uso de la leña y filtros de agua para familias por un costo mínimo para cada una de ellas. En agosto de 2008 Amigos empezará la construcción de un centro de capacitación “CECAP” con la finalidad de proveer capacitaciones en diferentes tipos de talleres, tales como sastrería, tejido con telares de pie, carpintería, soldadura, electricidad, administración de negocio y más. Eventualmente habrá un restaurante y una tienda para la venta de productos locales. Oportunidades para involucrarse con la organización incluyen la enseñanza de inglés, donaciones para recaudar fondos y mano de obra para la construcción del centro de capacitación.

Casa Milagro

Casa Milagro es una organización no lucrativa cuyo propósito es apoyar a los jóvenes, madres, niños y viudas en Santa Cruz, Guatemala. Grupos se reúnen en la Casa para programas educativos sobre la salud, higiene, nutrición, planificación familiar y otros temas importantes para las mujeres y madres. Casa
Milagro promociona entre las mujeres locales y sus hijos visitas al puesto de salud, e invita al personal de éste a dar seminarios y jornadas de atención Chequeos en el local de la Casa. Casa Milagro trabaja con madres con hijos desnutridos en la venta de artesanía hecha a mano, al fin de que ellas puedan ganar un poco de dinero y así proveer para sus niños. Muchas mujeres ya son tejedoras hábiles, y la organización las ayuda a mejorar sus habilidades y aprender a usar máquinas de coser y hacer mostacilla. Casa Milagro siempre busca a personas a quienes les interesa ayudar con la venta y distribución de las mostacillas y tejidos típicos que hacen las mujeres. Casa Milagro se esfuerza para mejorar la calidad de vida de viudas de mayor edad a través de la construcción de casas sencillas o mejoramiento de casas existentes, y la distribución de camas y muebles sencillos. También la ayuda a obtener pensiones del gobierno, pagando los gastos del proceso legal. Proyectos para el medio ambiente incluyen la recolección y el reciclaje de baterías, plásticos y vidrios. Casa Milagro da la bienvenida a voluntarios que estén dispuestos a aprender de los varios proyectos de la organización e involucrarse con éstos. Actualmente busca a alguien que podría diseñar y desarrollar la mostacilla y alguien para traducir el sitio web del alemán a inglés y español.

La Cruceñita/Asociación Biblioteca Escolar Santa Cruz La Laguna (ABESCLL)

La Cruceñita es la biblioteca escolar de la comunidad de Santa Cruz. Ahora cuenta con unos 5,000 libros, tres computadoras con Internet, y varios maquinas de escribir los cuales son utilizados diariamente por los estudiantes. La biblioteca es un recurso importante para estudiantes de cada nivel que los permite cumplir sus tareas e investigaciones. Su propósito mayor es proveer un ambiente tranquilo para estudiar y aprender. Los dos bibliotecarios están trabajando constantemente para mantener y mejorar el edificio, organizar y catalogar los libros, y asistir a los estudiantes desarrollar su capacidad de hacer investigaciones. ABESCLL es una organización autónoma que no recibe fondos de ninguna otra organización ni fundación, pero a la Asociación le gustaría desarrollar tales colaboraciones. Actualmente, la biblioteca depende de la generosidad de sus donadores, tantos locales como internacionales, para todos sus gastos: el salario de los bibliotecarios, la compra de más libros, y el mantenimiento y mejoramiento del edificio. La Asociación agradece cualquier donación de libros en español y especialmente busca más libros vocacionales.

Mayan Medical Aid

Mayan Medical Aid es una organización no lucrativa que está trabajando desde el 2004 con el objetivo de prestar servicios de salud a la población de Santa Cruz de una forma sostenible y de alta calidad. La clínica trabaja junto con el Ministerio de Salud del gobierno de Guatemala. La misión de Mayan Medical Aid es “romper con el ciclo de pobreza y desnutrición, en un contexto de respeto y armonía de las tradiciones culturales de los Maya.” La clínica provee atención primaria con énfasis en los niños y mujeres y tiene proyectos de nutrición y educación ambiental. El programa de español médico y dental para estudiantes, residentes, y médicos provee financiamiento a la organización para contribuir a su sostenibilidad, y provee a los participantes una inmersión cultural invaluabe. Los estudiantes tienen la oportunidad de trabajar en la clínica, y aprender español mientras practican. Los voluntarios extranjeros también contribuyen a los proyectos para la comunidad. La clínica misma tiene un ambiente amigable para la comunidad: los niños llegan para actividades educativas y para pasar tiempo leyendo y pintando mientras esperan para sus citas.
con el doctor o el dentista. El fin último de la organización es establecer un centro de salud auto-sostenible y administrado por personal local y capaz.
Appendix B

Arca de Noé Ecohotel

Arca de Noe supports the local economy by hiring long-term employees from the community, some of whom have worked there since the hotel opened in 1986. The ecological practices of the hotel minimize its negative impact on the natural environment. The hotel also uses a portion of its profits to provide monthly pensions for a group of 18 elderly adults and widows in the Santa Cruz community. Once a month the recipients, who were all identified as being in need by the community itself, are invited to the hotel to have cake and coffee, socialize, and receive the cash pensions. Arca de Noe often hosts volunteers who work in the community in various capacities. The owners are interested in having a volunteer come specifically to spend time with the elderly members of the community in order to learn about their daily lives and better understand their needs.

Arca de Noé apoya a la economía del pueblo por contratar empleados de largo plazo que son de la comunidad, algunos de los cuales han trabajado allí desde 1986 cuando el hotel fue fundado. Los aspectos ecológicos del hotel minimizan su impacto negativo en el medio ambiente. El hotel también utiliza un porcentaje de sus ganancias para dar pensiones mensuales a un grupo de 18 ancianos y viudas de Santa Cruz. Una vez al mes los ancianos, quienes fueron identificados por la misma comunidad como personas en necesidad de ayuda, son invitados al hotel para tomar café y pastel, disfrutarse, y recibir las pensiones. Frecuentemente, Arca de Noé recibe a voluntarios que trabajan en la comunidad en varias capacidades. A los dueños les gustaría tener un voluntario que vendría específicamente para pasar tiempo con las personas de mayor edad para aprender más de su vida diaria y entender mejor sus necesidades.

La Casa Rosa Hotel

La Casa Rosa is a hotel, restaurant and garden. The hotel collaborates with Mayan Medical Aid to provide comfortable, convenient and affordable lodging for foreign medical students who come to study medical Spanish and work in the clinic in Santa Cruz. In the past the hotel has sponsored educational and vocational training seminars for the residents of the village. Today, La Casa Rosa continues to support the local economy by providing employment to community members.

La Casa Rosa es un hotel, restaurante y jardín. El hotel colabora con Mayan Medical Aid para dar hospedaje cómodo, conveniente y de un precio razonable a estudiantes extranjeros de medicina que vienen a estudiar español médico y trabajar en la clínica en Santa Cruz. In the pasado el hotel ha organizado seminarios educativos y talleres de capacitación para los residentes del pueblo. Hoy en día, La Casa Rosa sigue apoyando a la economía local, proveyendo empleo para miembros de la comunidad.

La Iguana Perdida Hotel

La Iguana Perdida Hotel values its relationships with its local employees and does its part to protect its surroundings through environmentally-friendly practices. The hotel's restaurant, bar and patio serve as a casual meeting place for travelers and residents of Santa Cruz. Through the sale of “charity shots” a
percentage of the cost of each flavored vodka shot sold at the bar is donated to various projects in the community, depending on current needs and ideas. La Iguana Perdida often supports Amigos de Santa Cruz. The hotel also organizes yearly parties for children in the community and drives to collect trash and recyclables. On select Friday afternoons groups from the Iguana go up to the village to volunteer in English classes. New this year, the Saturday market at the Iguana brings together tourists, foreign-born residents and locals from the village. Other opportunities for community involvement include weaving, beadwork and Spanish classes for guests. Visitors interested in staying in the homes of locals families up in the village could also contact Deedle at the Iguana.

La Iguana Perdida Hotel estima sus relaciones con sus empleados locales y proteja su entorno natural a través de su compromiso ecológico. El restaurante, el bar y el patio del hotel proveen un lugar de encuentro para viajeros y residentes de Santa Cruz. A través del proyecto “tragos de caridad,” un porcentaje del precio de cada trago de vodka vendido es donado a varios proyectos en la comunidad, dependiendo de las ideas y necesidades actuales. Frecuentemente apoya a la Fundación Amigos de Santa Cruz. El hotel organiza fiestas anuales para niños del pueblo tanto como iniciativas de recolectar basura y reciclaje. En la tarde de los días viernes grupos suben del hotel al pueblo para ayudar con las clases de inglés. Desde este año hay un mercado en La Iguana los días sábado, al cual llegan turistas, residentes extranjeros y residentes del pueblo. Otras oportunidades para huéspedes que quieren involucrarse en la comunidad incluyen clases de tejido, mostacilla y español. Visitantes quienes quieren quedarse en la casa de una familia del pueblo también puedan contactar a Deedle en La Iguana.

Isla Verde Eco-chic Hotel

Isla Verde is a socially and environmentally conscious hotel whose goal is to improve the lives of everyone involved in the business. While it operates as a for-profit hotel and strives for excellence in service to its guests, every process at Isla Verde is guided by concern for the natural environment and social setting of the hotel. The hotel sponsors its employees from the Santa Cruz community as they pursue education and training in their professions as well as providing support for the children and families of employees. Plans for the future include an environmental education program. The hotel currently seeks volunteers to become involved in its environmental projects, especially during the low season.

Isla Verde es un hotel de alta conciencia social y ecológica cuyo fin es mejorar la vida de cada persona involucrada en la empresa. Aunque es un hotel de lucro y busca la excelencia en cuanto al servicio a sus clientes, cada proceso de Isla Verde se guía por una preocupación por el medio ambiente y el entorno social del hotel. El hotel apoya a sus empleados de la comunidad de Santa Cruz mientras ellos persiguen educación y capacitación en sus carreras, y también apoya a los hijos y a las familias de los empleados. Planes para el futuro incluyen un programa educativo sobre el medio ambiente. El hotel busca voluntarios para ayudar con sus proyectos ecológicos, particularmente en la temporada baja.

Villa Sumaya

Villa Sumaya is a hotel and retreat center whose mission might be described as an “interdenominational dedication to increasing awareness of our interconnectedness.” Besides holding retreats, and providing
healing and other health related services for their guests, the hotel is dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional Mayan culture and spirituality through education and ritual. The hotel's gift shop features products from Casa Milagro, Mayan Traditions (a fair-trade cooperative in Panajachel) books by several local authors on Mayan culture, as well as hand-made crafts by other local, independent Mayan and foreign resident artisans. A percentage of the profits of the owners another business, Eucalyptus Clothing Company, is donated to Amigos de Santa Cruz annually. The hotel endeavors to educate groups concerning the work of Amigos de Santa Cruz, Casa Milagro and Maya Traditions. Villa Sumaya also supports Amigos by offering housing to teachers from Michigan who come annually to further enhance the education of the teachers in the Santa Cruz primary school. Villa Sumaya serves as a nexus for community involvement, sharing its resources with the Mayan community and encouraging and enabling visitor's to share their gifts as well.

Villa Sumaya es un hotel y centro de retiro, cuya misión podría ser descrita como una "interdenominacional dedicación a aumentar la conciencia de nuestra interdependencia." Además de la celebración de retiros, y la curación y la prestación de otros servicios relacionados con la salud de sus huéspedes, el hotel se dedica a la preservación y el fomento de la cultura maya tradicional y la espiritualidad a través de la educación y el ritual. El hotel cuenta con tienda de regalos con productos elaborados por Casa Milagro, Tradiciones Mayas (un comercio justo de cooperación en Panajachel), libros de varios autores locales sobre la cultura Maya, así como artesanías hechas a mano por residentes artesanos Mayas del lugar y extranjeros residentes artesanos. Un porcentaje de los beneficios de los propietarios de un otro negocio, Compañía Eucaliptos, ha donado a Amigos de Santa Cruz al año. Villa Sumaya se esfuerza por educar a grupos en relación con la labor de Amigos de Santa Cruz, Casa Milagro y Tradiciones Maya. También apoya a Amigos de Santa Cruz en brindar hospedaje a 5 de los profesores de Michigan que viene anualmente para mejorar la educación de los maestros de la escuela primaria del pueblo de Santa Cruz. Villa Sumaya sirve de conexión para la participación de la comunidad, compartir los recursos con la comunidad Maya, alentar y permitir que los visitantes puedan compartir sus dones también.