



CFCA UPDATE

CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN AND AGING

Offering hope. Restoring dignity. Worldwide.

JULY 2009

Tourism drop affects indigenous tribe



CFCA/San Jose project

Clockwise from top left: A Maleku family member works on a carved mask; a worn wooden bridge leading to a village; Maria displays a drum; drinking gourds. Above: Villagers built a community hall to make items more accessible to tourists.

The global recession has hurt businesses catering to tourists who want to see the world. It's also hurt an indigenous community in Costa Rica that earns a living from sales of handicrafts to tourists.

Members of the Maleku community live in northern Costa Rica in the picturesque Guatuso Valley, 150 miles from San Jose. The Maleku are one of the last indigenous peoples in the country.

CFCA began working with the approximately 500 remaining community members in 1998. A total of 254 Maleku are sponsored through CFCA. Today's economic climate has slowed tourism dramatically in Costa Rica, and CFCA benefits have become especially important for the Maleku.

Before the worldwide recession hit,

tourists flocked to the Guatuso Valley to see colorful toucan birds, red and green poison arrow frogs, monkeys, the turquoise waters of the Rio Frio River, the rain forest and the active Arenal Volcano.

But no more.

In 2008, an average of four groups of tourists arrived each month. This year through April, only one group had visited.

"If they used to total sales of \$400 a month, now they are selling only \$30 a month," Rafael Villalobos, project coordinator for the San Jose project, said. "The current economic crisis is severely affecting tourism in the area. They have experienced around an 80 percent reduction of tourists visiting the zone."

The Maleku depend on the tourism trade because the region is remote. Few jobs are available, and the only major industry

ASK SPONSOR SERVICES

Each month, Ask Sponsor Services addresses a question frequently asked by our sponsors.



Q. Does CFCA sell or rent my name to outside agencies?

A. No. CFCA is grateful for the trust you place in us and we respect your privacy. CFCA understands that the privacy and security of your personal information is important to you, and we will never rent, lease, sell or share your name or personal information.

CFCA ranked among top 10 charities

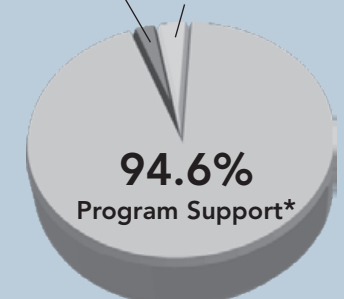
Charity Navigator, the nation's largest independent evaluator of charities, has ranked CFCA No. 4 among the nation's top 10 charities that have received the organization's most consecutive 4-star ratings.

CFCA has received a 4-star rating for the eighth year in a row and was the only sponsorship organization to be listed among the top 10 charities.

2008 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Fundraising 2.5%

Administration 2.9%



* Includes 88.4% project funding and 6.2% U.S.-based program support services

Source: 2008 Financial Statements

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Sponsorship helps Costa Rica tribe cope with decline in tourist sales

(Continued from front)

besides tourism is cattle ranching. Primary forests have been cleared to make room for grazing.

In order to make a living, many of the Maleku use their artisan skills. They carve balsa wood masks, make iguana skin drums, build rain sticks (bamboo filled with small sticks to simulate the sound of falling rain) and create decorated drinking gourds from the shells of the jicara fruit.

Tourists walking in front of the villagers' homes stop to view displays and, hopefully, purchase items.

Other Maleku take tourists on walking tours of the rain forest to see wildlife, medicinal plants, and cacao beans from which cocoa and chocolate are made.

In the past, old, wooden bridges also hampered tourist sales in one Maleku village—Palenque Tonjibe. Drivers of tourist buses were reluctant to cross the deteriorated bridges leading to the village because of safety concerns and fear of damaging the vehicles.

To address the problem, the San Jose

project staff helped the Maleku come up with a solution. The villagers built a more accessible community hall close to the road.

Villalobos said the village members traveled a long distance to the outskirts of the Tenorio volcano and spent 10 days in the forest cutting and preparing palm leaves to make the roof of the community hall.

"They finished it last year and saw higher income," Villalobos said. "Unfortunately, nowadays the number of tourists is minimal."

Paul Pearce, CFCA director of international programs, said this story illustrates how sponsorship is vital to help families weather economic ups and downs. "It's an example of the precarious nature of a family's narrow budget," Pearce said. "Sponsorship can help absorb some of the blow of an economic impact like this."

CFCA/San Jose project

The Maleku of Costa Rica rely on tourist purchases of handmade items such as iguana skin drums, right.



Family's income falls with decline in tourism

Maleku community member Maria Lillian is the mother of Joselyn, an 8-year-old sponsored child; Marta, an 18-year-old CFCA scholarship student; and three other children.

Before the economic downturn, Maria and her family could count on selling painted balsa masks for \$20 to \$50 depending on design and size, jicara gourds for \$10 to \$20, and rain sticks for \$20 to \$50.

They had to work hard to earn a few dollars for each handicraft. For example, a mask takes up to 15 days to be completed. Family members must locate a balsa tree as far away as 25 miles. In their home shop using hand tools, they cut the wood into small

pieces, dry it, then carve and decorate the mask with paintings of local flora and fauna.

This year, the family's income has declined because of less tourism. The few customers who still visit now drive a hard bargain, further eroding monthly sales. To cope, Maria has started making bread to sell in order to supplement her family's income.

"This is a difficult situation for the family," Rafael Villalobos, San Jose project coordinator, said. "On the one hand, they love what they do and they value their culture and tradition. On the other hand, they are not making enough money to cover their needs."



CFCA/San Jose project

The family of Maria, right, depends on sales of handicraft items to tourists, but sales have plunged because of the economic downturn. Clockwise from center: Joselyn, Felipe, Jahiro, Martha and Maria.