



Local ecotourism as an economic niche for endangered camel breedsâ€™™ conservation

Description

Camels are exotic elements, which can be comprised of adventure travel companies promoting ecotourism activities. Such recreations contribute to sustainable livelihoods for local communities and educational empowerment towards nature and its conservation. At present, some local camel breedsâ€™™ survival reduces to this animal-based leisure industry and its reliability to perform and promote customized services accurately.



For centuries, Canarian camels participated in multiple agricultural labors, military operations, and a beast of burden at short and long distances. According to historical chronicles, the opening of island ports to Atlantic traffic in the late 1800s led to the evolvement of an active tourism network that completely changed the functional destination of these animals in the islands a few decades later. The mechanization of agricultural works and transportation means from the last third of the 20th century made its census suffer a dramatic reduction in rural areas and being this species progressively adapted to the transport of tourists instead. Fortunately, tourism rise and expansion in the 1990s resulted in population recovery. Since then, these animals have a cardinal role in the tourism industry, which is the principal income source for local camel breeders apart from the European Union live animal market. Other emerging but still minoritarian productive niches of this breed, which lack phenotypic characterization and selection programs, are milk, meat, and wool.

The current census of this camel breed is estimated at 1200 individuals, and it is included in the Spanish Official Catalogue of Livestock as an endangered autochthonous breed since 2012 by the Order AAA/251/2012 of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment. As it constitutes the only Spanish and European traditional camel population, this distinctive breed deserves functional revaluation for selective breeding with conservation purposes. With this objective, an in-depth assessment of camel tourism dimensions is fully required given its far-iconic tourism attractiveness.



By conducting an on-site questionnaire to customers participating in camelback riding tours, researchers from Cordoba (Spain) assessed the motivational factors affecting participation, satisfaction, and loyalty in this tourism segment that may have made it socially differentiated. The sixfold combination of staff performance, culture geography, diverse and humane close interaction, camel behavior and performance, sociotemporal context, and

positive previous experience involves the elemental dimensions that explain customer satisfaction and return intention probability within this entertainment business.

This applied research is the first holistic approach in this applied-research field. Customer knowledge is essential for stakeholders to build personalized riding experiences and align profits with environmental sustainability and biodiversity mainstream concerns into their everyday operations. In turn, domestic camel tourist rides could be managed as a viable path to nature conservation by helping endangered local breeds to avoid their functional devaluation and potential extinction.

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