

La Loma- Tourism and Sustainability

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For the purpose of this report as an accurate analysis of the La Loma operation, I will focus solely on the aspects of their '*Cacao & Permaculture Tour*'. The most accurate way to define La Loma is as an agritourism operation. Agritourism is defined as combining "elements of tourism and agriculture by offering visitors the opportunity to gain knowledge and direct experience related to farming practices, rural traditions, or the local environment" (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023, p. 3). This definition best reflects our experience, as we visited a working farm and gained insights into the agricultural practice of permaculture. On their website, La Loma markets this tour as an exploration of the farm, allowing visitors to "wander through the array of fruits, veggies, and thriving plants" (La Loma). Throughout the tour, we were able to taste and smell the farm's plants, while our guide provided specific local and traditional context/functions of the plants.

An analytical framework scholars have presented for sustainable agritourism focuses on three main areas: Economic Growth, Community Engagement and the Environmental Dimension. The Economic Framework emphasizes the importance of the operations' contributions "to the local economy by generating income and employment opportunities." (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023, p. 6) Agritourism seeks to encourage entrepreneurship and business development by farmers diversifying their income by offering opportunities outside of traditional farm functions. Value Chain Development is also mentioned as an important component of promoting local sourcing by "connecting farmers with other actors such as food processors, restaurants, and retailers."(Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023, p. 7) Community engagement is vital to the

social dimension of the framework. Community bonds should be strengthened by their involvement in the operation's initiatives. Encouraging interactions between visitors and local residents, promoting cultural exchange and understanding (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023, p. 7). Agritourism helps foster pride and cultural identity within the community by preserving local traditions, cultural heritage, and traditional farming practices. Sustainable Land Use is essential as agritourism should promote responsible land use practices, by the use of environmentally friendly practices that minimize environmental impacts. Agritourism aims to enhance the visitors' understanding of agriculture and food production, they can facilitate ecotourism activities that enhance awareness and support environmental conservation initiatives.

Overall, I believe the *La Loma* operation aligns well with this framework. Our guide was a local from Isla Basimentos, contributing to employment opportunities and connections/bonds between locals and visitors. The operation was also diversified, generating income from multiple sources, including merchandising, a hotel, and a restaurant. This also supports value chain development, as the operation integrates sectors such as foodservice and hospitality, promoting local economic development and growth. Throughout the tour, we were educated on the plants, their growth patterns as well as their uses and benefits. This aligns with the sustainable land use framework by promoting environmentally responsible practices and by enhancing visitors' understanding of sustainable farming practices and food production.

Acknowledging that my visit to this organization was brief and limited to one excursion, I am reluctant to be overly critical. However, based on my observations, one area where La Loma could improve within the framework is representing local traditions and cultural heritage more broadly across its operations. While our guide was a local, the overall experience did not strongly facilitate cultural exchange. A feasible way to enhance this could be by selling more

merchandise made by locals (the dishware sold was made from China). This would not only enrich the cultural aspect of the experience but would also stimulate growth of the local economy. Another aspect of the framework that was not fully fulfilled was the integration of conservation efforts within the operation. While the tour emphasized permaculture, enhancing awareness and support of environmental conservation could be improved through signage in the lodge or by further integrating messaging within the tour script. These additions to La Loma operation would further its alignment with the sustainable agritourism framework by strengthening cultural representation, economic growth, and environmental conservation efforts.

References

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