

Sustainability Ideas for Panabaj

For those travelers seeking a more personal experience with Guatemala's people and history, X Tours offers an informative and emotionally impacting tour of Panabaj. Panabaj's residents, after surviving two decades of civil strife and natural disasters, are taking unique measures not only to rebuild their community but to strengthen their economy from a grassroots level. The tour of Panabaj leads you along the path of the 2005 mudslide – a result of Hurricane Stan – while a local guide describes the impact of subsequent relief efforts; at the end, participants meet the women who benefit from the tour business, using the profits to support their own budding artisanal ventures. A visit to Panabaj is an inspiring if sober reminder of the persistent spirit of Guatemalans, even in the face of near ruin.

The Town

- 2005 Hurricane Stan hit Guatemala – 800 casualties in the nation, 250 in the town of Panabaj
- Large landslides buried the town
- Mud up to 4m high
- Small town of 4000 lost 250
- Local infrastructure taken out
- Lost assistance and attention b/c of earthquake in Pakistan 3 days after hurricane
- USAID rebuilt 600 homes, but needed 800 – 200 families leftover in temporary camp on church owned property (currently 17 months old). Hesitant to rebuild permanent structures for fear of another landslide in the same area.
- Many women produce craft products for tourists in the area



- One group of 14 women has formed in the town to share resources and create a type of co-op for producing their crafts and selling them



The Cooperative

- 14 women producing beaded crafts together.
- The group buys materials and distributes them to individual women. Those women who don't produce goods need only return the materials; no debt involved.
- Hope to use revenue towards their own education and the education of their children. Currently, most women of Panabaj can only speak their native language. They hope their sons and daughters will be able to read, write, and speak Spanish as well as ____.

The Tour

- 2 spanish speaking men give a tour of what the town used to be, very informative and knowledgeable, willing to answer many questions
- See the school, hospital, church, and government compound (all no longer functioning) and proof of damage – mud lines, bent frames, etc.
- See land where 80 families once resided, and now not a soul resides
- See the temporary camp where families still remain without homes and power
- Community rarely encounters tourists, most foreigners are relief workers
- Very moving and powerful experience for any visitor to see the hardest hit Guatemalans and talk with people who are working hard to get back on their feet, great for someone who wants to get off the tourist track for a moment to see how many people still live in the world
- Witness the aftermath of relief work; hear from those hardest hit what has worked and what hasn't. Participate in their efforts to rebuild Panabaj via entrepreneurial and socially conscious efforts.
- Very faithful community, view visitors not as an opportunity to make a quick dollar, but as a chance to share their story

Other Ideas

- Diversify services/tour offered: offer a package where tourists would create their own jewelry, supervised and taught by the local women
- Possible expansion into new life cards if a larger market can be found
- Language lessons in the l
- Would like to build a hostel for tourists
- English guides/translator services?
- See more of women working
- Pre-arrange transportation to/from Santiago to Panabaj