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Agritourism in Latin America: A Cosmovision-to-Marketing Reflection

Latin America's diverse agritourism experiences are often marketed under other niche travel segments. Strengthening the agritourism brand can attract conscious, high-spending travelers and support sustainable rural development.

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Summary

Latin America boasts a distinct and rich natural and cultural heritage. The region, along with its individual countries and localities, features a mosaic of iconic destinations that cater to a wide range of travel experiences, ranging from generalized (e.g., sun, sand, and sea) to specialized (e.g., bird watching) interests. By drawing in specialized travelers – who often have higher purchasing power and tend to be more culturally and environmentally conscious - Latin America has gained recognition for its ecotourism, culinary tourism, experiential tourism, and other niche travel experiences, all of which highlight its diverse landscapes and heritage. However, agritourism in Latin America remains largely unacknowledged as a distinct travel segment despite its rich agricultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. This oversight is noteworthy given that the region is the cradle of many agricultural products that have become staple ingredients worldwide, such as potatoes, corn, and tomatoes. Alongside this agricultural wealth, Latin America offers a diverse repertoire of travel experiences that highlight unique practices, products, and lifestyles tied with its agricultural traditions. However, these experiences are seldom recognized or promoted as agritourism, missing an opportunity to leverage the region's deep agricultural roots. The limited recognition of agritourism as a distinct brand in Latin America may stem from the region's prevailing indigenous cosmovision, which views agriculture as an integral part of their livelihoods, thus often framed as experiential or heritage tourism. Alternatively, the region's pride in local foods and beverages often leads to categorizing these activities under culinary tourism. Regardless of the reason, the absence of a clear and standalone identity for agritourism is limiting policy development, outreach, and advocacy efforts, thereby restricting the potential of a travel segment that brings substantial benefits to local producers, their communities, and overall society.

The Value and Interest of the Case Study

This case study highlights the importance of strategically branding agritourism in Latin America to attract the growing segment of travelers seeking immersive agriculture-centered experiences. By strengthening agritourism branding, Latin America can tap into a market segment that is not only culturally and environmentally conscious but also boasts a high purchasing power.

The Latin America Context

Latin America encompasses the collective region of the Americas made up of the 26 countries where Romance languages – Spanish, Portuguese, and French – are predominantly spoken. Given Latin American refers to a shared linguistic heritage, neighboring countries where other languages (e.g., English, Dutch, Creole)

predominate are often excluded from this cultural classification (e.g., Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica). Narrower classifications may emphasize geographic or linguistic sub-regions, such as the Caribbean, or the Portuguese-speaking America. Altogether, Latin America is home to a population exceeding 650 million people.

Latin America is inherently difficult to characterize beyond its common linguistic roots because of its remarkable natural, agricultural, and cultural diversity. Its natural richness includes unique ecosystems with distinctive flora and fauna, such as the Amazon Rainforest and the Galápagos Islands, and stunning geological formations, such as the Colca Canyon and Angel Falls. Its ancient civilizations, such as the Maya (Southern North America and Northern Central America) and the Inca (South America) leveraged their ecological variability to cultivate and domesticate a wide range of agricultural products, some of which have become core ingredients worldwide, such as cacao, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, and avocados.

The region also embodies a blend of cultures shaped by numerous indigenous groups, the European invaders (15th–19th century), and subsequent waves of forced and voluntary migration, such as the transatlantic slavery of Africans (16th–19th centuries) and exodus of Italians and Germans (19th–20th centuries). Over the years, this cultural mix has fostered the co-existence of indigenous and immigrant beliefs and practices, as well as syncretism resulting in new and distinct cultural manifestations. This cultural mosaic reflects into their arts, folklore, cuisine, and tangible and intangible heritage. Importantly, Latin Americans embody a 'cultura viva' (living culture) by integrating their traditional lifestyles and beliefs into their daily lives (Sotomayor et al., 2019).

Latin America's rich diversity and *cultura viva* have fueled a thriving tourism industry. Over the past decades, the region has grown in popularity as a tourism destination, making a significant contribution to the GDP of several countries (López, 2024). While many tourists choose Latin America for generalized experiences (e.g., sightseeing, beach vacations), niche tourism offerings, such as ecotourism, bird watching, culinary and craft-beverage tourism, and archaeological exploration are flourishing. Increasingly, travelers to the region are also seeking to experience its *cultura viva* by immersing themselves in traditional lifestyles and practices, such as shamanism. However, agritourism is rarely portrayed as a niche travel experience in the region.

Agritourism in Latin America: To Be or Not to Be?

The broad niche tourism landscape across Latin America, particularly related to nature (ecotourism), cuisine and craft-beverages (culinary and craft-beverage tourism), and *cultura viva* (experiential tourism) could be positioned through the lens of agritourism. While variations across the globe exist due to geopolitical, legal, and socio-cultural contexts, agritourism is generally understood as the result of a synergistic intersection of the tourism and agriculture industries (Quendler *et al.*, 2024). This intersection creates opportunities to engage in authentic recreation, leisure, or educational experiences related to agriculture that foster a deeper understanding of tangible and intangible heritage of a region or locality (Gil Arroyo *et al.*, 2013; Chase *et al.*, Forthcoming).

This general understanding of agritourism centers around the blend of natural, social, and (agri)cultural heritage that is directly linked with authentic agricultural livelihoods, rather than being limited to specific types of experiences. Whether agritourism experiences should be offered exclusively in working agricultural settings is debatable given global variations. Yet, a restrictive examination of agritourism often limits it to on-site experiences within active – working – agricultural settings, such as farmlands, or agricultural value-added facilities. Within this definitional framework, Latin American offers a rich mix of on-site agricultural experiences connected to its diverse food ingredients and cuisine, circular cosmovision, and integrated food and cultural systems.

Latin America is the cradle of many agricultural products that have become staple ingredients worldwide, such as avocado, cacao, corn, potatoes, and tomatoes. Across the region, a variety of initiatives provide unique experiences to visit authentic production sites, allowing visitors to appreciate traditional cultivation practices and learn about the craftsmanship behind them. For example, cacao producers in Costa Rica often welcome visitors to their plantations (Fig. 1) and several communities in the Andean region of Peru showcase the hundreds of potato varieties they grow. Yet, these experiences are often marketed as ecotourism in Costa Rica or cultural tourism in Peru, missing an opportunity to build recognition and awareness of agritourism (branding) among travelers.

Likewise, travelling to experience authentic cuisine and beverages has become a central activity across Latin America given its unique fusion of indigenous flavors, ingredients, and cooking techniques with influences from Western, African or Asian cultures resulting from several waves of immigration. These experiences are often woven into broader offerings that immerse visitors in traditional local agricultural livelihoods. For example, openfire *gaucho* grilling in Argentina and Uruguay accompanied by demonstrations – or even participation – in cattle drives. Or visits to small family-owned *palenques* (artisanal distilleries) in Oaxaca (Mexico) to engage in the Mezcal crafting process, from harvesting agave to the final tasting. Plainly, these activities are often offered as immersive culinary or craft-beverage tourism, once again limiting agritourism branding.



Fig. 1. Visiting a plantation of cocoa, coffee and sugar cane in Monteverde, Costa Rica to learn about their entire grow-to-value added process. (© Author).

The integration of traditional lifestyles and beliefs into daily life (*cultura viva*) along with the circular cosmovision – where everything is connected – prevailing in many areas across Latin America, may help explain the blurred line between agritourism and associated niche forms of tourism. Within a circular cosmovision, providers view weaving and pottery making as agricultural activities as their resources (soil, fiber) are seen as gifts from Mother Earth (Fig. 2). Rituals offering coca leaves to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) for gratitude or to seek favorable augury



Fig. 2. A demonstration of traditional weaving, including natural dyeing pigments used, after visiting the animal grazing lands in Cusco, Peru. (© Author).

for their agricultural tasks, such as planting or harvesting, are embedded in this circular cosmovision. Therefore, these activities could be marketed as agritourism rather than cultural or mystic tourism, helping to strengthen the branding of this growing travel niche segment.

Unlocking the Agritourism Potential in Latin America

Chiefly, there is a rich agritourism repertoire in Latin America that showcases unique agricultural practices (e.g., terrace farming), products (e.g., ingredients), and lifestyles (e.g., cuisine) tied to its farming livelihoods and heritage. These practices compose the region's *cultura viva* and are also embedded into a circular cosmovision where standard dichotomies prevailing in the Western world, such as natural vs cultural heritage and private vs public spaces, are often blurry or indistinct. As such, agriculturally based experiences, elsewhere branded as agritourism, are generally marketed under many labels, most often culinary tourism, *vivencial* or experiential tourism, and ecotourism.

While leveraging on popular niche travel categories within the region's countries may seem strategic, it could be hampering the development or consolidation of a robust regional agritourism brand. A brand name—agritourism in this case—is essential for effective marketing, making it more recognizable and appealing to targeted audiences (Aaker, 1991; Barbieri et al., 2016). It defines and differentiates the experience (e.g., agriculturally based), provides key information about it (e.g., authenticity, immersion), and can influence price and willingness to purchase (Grewal et al., 1998). Therefore, Latin America must strengthen its agritourism brand to leverage it and complement its already established portfolio of niche tourism offerings.

Strengthening the agritourism brand in Latin America is especially important considering that agritourists tend to seek immersive and enriching experiences that facilitate a connection to local heritage and a meaningful interaction with locals (Baby et al., 2024), all of which can contribute to the sustainability and even regeneration of destinations (Richards, 2021). Beyond marketing effectiveness, having a strong and unified brand can boost the programming and management of agritourism in the region by facilitating the communication and collaboration among stakeholders (Barbieri et al., 2016). For example, it can support the development of specialized agritourism routes, like Ecuador's existing Cacao routes, expanding opportunities for sustainable development in rural destinations.

Furthermore, establishing a consistent agritourism brand across Latin America can contribute to science-informed outreach activities (e.g., knowledge sharing), advocacy efforts, and policies aimed at fostering agritourism growth, consolidation, and long-term sustainability (Colton and Bissix, 2005; Barbieri *et al.*, 2016; Hollas *et al.*, 2021). This is particularly necessary given that Latin America appears to be trailing other world regions in terms of science-based information on agritourism (Vélez Arenas, 2020). Altogether, strengthening the marketing, programming, and management effectiveness of agritourism, along with refining outreach, advocacy, and policy initiatives, can contribute to the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits this industry brings to producers, their surrounding communities, and overall society (Barbieri, 2013). Building a strong agritourism brand can also spark related initiatives, such as product and process certifications (e.g., denomination of origin), enhancing the sense of authenticity and uniqueness of destinations across Latin America.

Conclusions

Latin America's rich and diverse cultural and natural tapestry provides a strong foundation for globally recognized niche tourism experiences. Rooted in its ancestral agricultural livelihoods, *cultura viva*, and circular cosmovision, the region also offers an amalgam of agriculturally based experiences to visitors. However, the region has yet to develop an agritourism brand because most of its agriculturally based experiences are marketed under other niche tourism types, particularly ecotourism and cultural tourism, the latter emphasizing mystical, experiential, and culinary segments. By strengthening the agritourism brand, Latin America can improve marketing, management, and programming effectiveness, and inform science-based outreach, advocacy, and policy efforts to support the growth, consolidation, and long-term sustainability of agritourism. Doing so can also support other related initiatives that, combined, can contribute to sustainable and regenerative development, particularly in rural areas.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Note on the origin

Expanded from a main speech the author, Dr. Carla Barbieri, delivered at the 2nd World Congress on Agritourism (Bolzano, Italy) in May 2024 titled: Agritourism in Latin America: Does it really exist?

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